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TWO NAMES
UPON THE SHORE

By the same Author

THE GALAXY
JULIAN PROBERT
NOW WE SET OUT
THE PROSELYTE
ANGER IN THE SKY
ONE FIGHT MORE

and

WOMAN ALIVE
BIG FROGS AND LITTLE FROGS
BLACK WHITE AND CAROLINE


TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

By
Susan Ertz




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I

IN the Spring of 1939 Maud Cotter was in London again, after spending nearly two years at her home in Boston, Massachusetts. The time had passed pleasantly enough, but it was not her habit to be long away from Europe. A lover of her own country, her palate pleased and stimulated—so that the patriotic juices were kept flowing—by the good salty flavour of American life, she had other needs which could only be satisfied by Europe. She had nieces and nephews who thought her a bad American and said that she was blind to what America had to offer; but she was not blind, she was greedy, and if two goods lay within her reach she would take both. Her zest was greater than theirs, her capacity for enjoyment exceeded theirs. They were young iconoclasts concerning the gods of their elders, and had not as yet begun to set up gods of their own.

Crossing the Atlantic she thought, "This may be the last time," and felt like a hungry man confronted by more food than he can eat to-day, knowing that there may be none to-morrow, but unable to take away more than his stomach can hold. And now that she was in London for a short stay only, she wanted to clear the ground to leave herself free to do the things she had planned to do, so she was busy seeing certain old friends whom she could not come to England and not see. The first of these were Lettice (Letty) and Nelson Hallam. She had telephoned to Letty that morning

and Letty had insisted that she come to tea that same afternoon. "I want to be the first of your friends to see you," she said, at the same time asking a favour and conferring one. And Maude told Lowell Pierce, who had come from Boston with her, that she would have to go, speaking with an air of reluctance, though she had every intention of going.

She had an elder-sister feeling towards Letty, a little sentimental because of old memories and mixed often enough with irritation, but nevertheless tough and enduring. As she waited now in Letty's drawing-room she saw many things with which she had been familiar in the previous much smaller house in Kensington. This present house she thought big enough for an embassy, or at least a legation. Numerous additions had been made, and it amused her to note what new objects had attracted Letty's magpie eye. What Letty liked, she liked; no one could tell her anything. No one ever could. The lampshades made Maud think of Burmese temples done in silk, with points and knobs and fringes. On the great Bechstein grand piano—did Mary, she wondered, still play on it?—was a cut-glass bowl full of tulips, arranged, she felt sure, by the accurate eye and careful, unloving hand of Burroughs, the elderly parlourmaid. The house looked as though it had been "done" by some big department store. Everything bore witness to it: the shiny brocades, the rugs—crudely coloured imitations of Aubusson carpets, covering the parquet floor almost from wall to wall—the new and glossy walnut furniture, the tall red lacquer Chinese Chippendale secretary desk which looked as though it had just come from the manufacturers and was probably as expensive as a genuine piece would have been.

"Why," Letty had once asked, "should I pay good money for wormholes and dry-rot?" Letty knew the goodness of money. She had once ached and yearned for it. Over the handsome Adam fireplaces, which were an original part of the house, were huge French mirrors in elaborate gilt frames. Across one mantel marched a row of Nuremberg jugs, which Letty had once bought at an auction sale; across the other paraded a row of ivory elephants. One of these had been a present from Maud's mother to Letty on her fifteenth birthday, the others she had industriously collected. There were oil paintings to which Maud's eye was drawn again and again with something of the painful fascination with which the eye is drawn to some abnormality, or to the body of a dead animal in the road. These, Maud thought, had doubtless come from the "art" department of the same large store. One was of woolly Highland cattle surrounded by mists and woolly heather—a picture that must have been painted a thousand times, and, all too often, by the same hand—another a blatant garden scene loud with delphiniums, lupins and crimson ramblers. And Maud asked herself, not for the first time, "Well, why shouldn't Letty like what she likes?" And to that there was no answer.

Nelson's hand, she thought, was apparent in the way the radio was fitted into the wall between bookshelves, and covered with a door of painted gauze, and in the massive silver cigarette boxes, some inscribed, which looked as though they might play a tune when the lids were raised; probably John Peel. Though the Hallams' lack of taste was flagrant, Maud was merely amused by it. She had been brought up among ugly things in one of the ugliest houses in Boston, but her mother

lived among them because of their associations, while the Hallams went out and bought them. What Nelson required was comfort—solid, expensive, smooth-running comfort. He only wanted the best of everything, the price-list best. He demanded the utmost efficiency in his home as in his business, and Letty's efficiency in the management of a house was beyond question.

The strange butler who had admitted Maud had said mournfully that Madam would be down in a few minutes. Five minutes had passed and there was no sign of her, no sound in the big, unfriendly house. There had been a time when Maud would have run up the stairs, calling, "Letty! Where are you?" but to do so here would have seemed inappropriate.

She let her mind run back to her first meeting with Letty Parrish in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris in the Spring of 1914. Mrs. Parrish, her pretty, long-suffering mother, had been in the habit of taking the eleven-year-old Letty into the Bois every morning, for the child loved to ride on the roundabouts and catch rings on a stick, winning prizes of sugar candy. Maud, twenty-one, and old for her years even then, had stood watching one day at her mother's side, half wishing she were young enough to take a turn. They saw Letty get down when the music stopped, present her rings and receive her prize. The day being warm, she was coatless and hatless and her light brown hair hung down her back. She had evidently been aware of their interest, for she came up to them and said, holding her stick of candy, "I've seen you here before. I'm English and my name's Letty Parrish. You're American, aren't you?" She spoke without a trace of shyness,

and led them purposefully to where her mother sat reading under a chestnut tree. A few days later the Cotters went to lunch with the Parrishes in their small flat in the Isle de la Cité, and a friendship was thus begun.

The meeting turned out to be providential for Mrs. Parrish. Leonard Parrish, her husband, had lost his job as agent for a firm of Yorkshire woollen merchants and was in debt and in other difficulties, of whose nature Mrs. Parrish was only just becoming unhappily aware. Paris had been the undoing of him, a process which had been gathering momentum for over five years. Refusing to go back to England, he had been drifting from one job to another with lengthening periods of unemployment until his funds were exhausted. Mrs. Parrish, trying hard to believe that the situation was not yet hopeless and her domestic happiness not quite irretrievable, gave English lessons every afternoon and bore her sorrows with patience and smiling courage. But the rot had gone too far, and not long after the Cotters appeared on the scene Leonard Parrish disappeared, leaving a note to say that he had no intention of returning and that it would be useless to look for him. The smiles and the breaking heart had tried him beyond his endurance. Mrs. Parrish did, nevertheless, ask the police to look for him, and he was found living with a dancer in the Montparnasse quarter. That was the end.

Thanks to Mrs. Cotter's financial help, all four presently returned to London. But her kindness did not stop there. She was the friend of all women who had suffered through no fault of their own from light-minded husbands, and she championed Mrs. Parrish

with a missionary zeal lightened by humour. She loved neatness and order and wanted to see the ragged edges of Ethel Parrish's life nicely turned and hemmed. Her mother, Maud thought, glancing back over a series of such episodes, had the rare gift of being able to interfere benevolently and successfully in the lives of other people. She brought to such problems an intensely practical point of view, a knowledge of business affairs and genuine sympathy. The combination was irresistible. After considering various alternatives she had finally bought the lease of a house in Richmond and turned it over to Mrs. Parrish to run as a select boarding house, with herself and Maud as the first boarders. Once the establishment began to pay, Mrs. Cotter was to receive an agreed percentage of profits.

Then came the war, and somewhat reluctantly—for it annoyed her that her actions should be dictated by outside events—Mrs. Cotter took her daughter back to Boston. They did not return to England till the summer of 1920, and on their arrival they learnt that Mrs. Parrish had just decided to marry again, Leonard Parrish having been killed fighting with the French in the Battle of the Marne.

They found Letty, now seventeen, in furious revolt against her mother and the man her mother wanted to marry, a kindly, cultured bachelor of fifty named Evan Fulbright who was head of a preparatory school for boys in Gloucestershire. It was clear to the Cotters that a very real happiness was in danger of being wrecked by Letty's intransigence, so they took her away with them to Cornwall while poor harassed Mrs. Parrish closed the boarding house, married her schoolmaster and went for her honeymoon to the Lake District.

By the time the newly married pair were settled in Gloucestershire, a more or less reconciled Letty was ready to join them. No one except her mother, Maud reflected, had ever been able to influence Letty in the slightest degree, and her fondness for her protégée was consequently great. Some compensation was due to her mother, Maud thought, for her inability to influence either of her own children. Both Maud and her brother Bart had inherited their mother's strong will rather than their father's amiable ductility in matters domestic. Bart had married a girl Mrs. Cotter could not like, and Maud had not married at all.

Mrs. Parrish's marriage had quickened Letty's determination to provide herself with a home of her own. She proposed to marry, at the first opportunity, a man already settled in life and considerably older than herself. The Cotters were not surprised to hear, therefore, in 1921, that she was engaged and that her marriage would take place as soon as they paid their annual visit to England. Maud could still recall the wording of her letter.

You've heard of Hallam Typewriters, of course, [Letty had written in her schoolgirlish hand]. Everyone has. Well, that's Nelson. His uncle died a few years ago and left him the business and a lot of money. He started as an ordinary employee and now he is head of the firm. I met him at my first grown-up dance, a hunt ball in Warwickshire. He is a widower and has a six-year-old daughter, so I shall be a stepmother at eighteen! We will live in London and Nelson will expect me to entertain a good deal.

Much the same sort of letter she would have written

to-day, with no attempt made to cover up her unashamedly practical outlook.

They had gone to the wedding, which took place at the village church near Evan Fulbright's school. Mrs. Fulbright had been relieved that her headstrong daughter was marrying into good hands, and the Cotters thought Nelson a man of sense and ability. Mrs. Cotter was especially pleased by his warmly expressed gratitude for all that they had done for Letty. Nelson's little daughter Mary, a dark, delicate-looking, unsmiling child, was bridesmaid. Mrs. Cotter did not take to her, but she interested Maud who noticed a look of apprehension in her eyes, though she seemed not to have lacked care and attention.

Maud yawned, the open, satisfying yawn of the unobserved, and took out her engagement book. This was the tenth of April and the year 1939. She was going to Paris the following week with Lowell Pierce. The prospect was an extremely agreeable one. She turned a number of pages. She'd promised to go to Cape Cod to join her mother for at least part of the summer, and had therefore booked a return passage for the end of July. She had between fourteen and fifteen weeks in which to do what she pleased provided she went the rounds of the picture exhibitions, made some purchases for a Boston art gallery and sent off a monthly article for the *Amateur Collector*. Here, duty and inclination were in complete accord. "Bliss," she said, aloud and put her engagement book back into her handbag. Then she heard Letty's step on the stair.

One of the first things Maud had noticed about Letty was her way of walking. It was so absolutely Letty.

She came into the room now with that familiar motion which seemed to combine the walk of a self-conscious school miss wearing her first pair of high heels with the hip-swinging walk of a voluptuous native woman. She stepped lightly and delicately on her small feet and at the same time revolved her hips so that her skirts, which she wore fashionably short, swung gaily about her legs with their agreeably rounded calves. Her mother and Mrs. Cotter had often enough scolded her about that walk, saying that it was the "follow me" walk of a not nice girl, but they had never succeeded in modifying it. Maud had often told her that it was time she abandoned it in the interests of respectability and matronhood, but Letty said she hoped never to look like a matron and didn't care about seeming respectable. She was interested in being it, she said, only because in the long run it saved a lot of trouble. "If people misunderstood my walk that's their lookout. It's *my* walk." But from the waist upwards she was the very pattern of dignity and carried herself well.

She kissed Maud on both cheeks and said in her pretty, consciously modulated, somewhat artificial voice:

"How are you, Maud darling? I'm sorry I had to keep you waiting, but I was having massage and Miss Ohlson was late."

Maud, who had never had massage in her life, not even of the facial sort, asked her what she was having it for. Had she been ill? Letty said she had not been ill; it was just that Nelson liked her to have it.

"Take off your coat," she said. "It's boiling hot in here. The central heating in this house is almost too good."

They sat on a deep sofa placed at right angles to the fireplace where an electric fire glowed falsely among false coals and sent out an amber light and no heat. Maud took off her black coat uncovering a severely plain black dress. For over fifteen years she had worn nothing but black, relieved, at times, by white. It saved, she said, endless trouble ; everything went with everything else and she could travel more lightly than other people. With her black suits she usually wore lingerie blouses trimmed with fine tucks or lace. These, her underwear and her hats came from Paris ; her tailormades, furs and coats from London and her dresses and shoes from Boston. Her hats were of the latest fashion and often frivolous and extreme, but she was quite unconcerned by the fact that they did not suit her mature and regular features. She wore them, she said, because they amused her.

Letty, too, was in black, a clever French model ornamented only by a superb diamond brooch. Seeing Maud's eye on it she said, fingering it :

"Lovely, isn't it? Nelson gave it to me for our wedding anniversary, last year."

"It's magnificent," said Maud. "I gather Nelson is still pleased with his bargain. Dear Letty, it's good to see you. You look just as you always did."

It was true that Letty's features accommodated themselves without noticeable change to childhood, girlhood or womanhood, and Maud thought it would be difficult to guess her age. She might be twenty-five or thirty-five. She wore a demure air like that of a child caught in some charming, unpunishable folly. Maud had once asked a friend of hers, a Frenchman, what he thought of Letty, and he had replied after some thought,

"*Elle est trop ta-ta.*" The term was untranslatable, but Maud knew what he meant. To-day Letty was wearing her fine, light brown hair combed upwards to the top of her head, the ends neatly turned in. The effect was both elegant and naïve and gave her the look of a young girl on her way to the bath.

"I told Shaw to bring in tea," she said with her air of a child playing prettily at being hostess.

"His name's Shaw, is it? He's new to me," Maud remarked.

"His name's really O'Shaughnessy, but you can't call a butler O'Something."

"Can't you? Why not?"

"I don't know," Letty said. "You just can't. He'd come unstuck or something. Maud, you'll stay to dinner, won't you? I meant to ask you when you rang up, but you took me by surprise."

"I can if you like," Maud said, "and if you haven't got a party."

Letty said, "No, thank heaven, we're not having a party. There'll just be ourselves and Mary."

"How's Mary?"

"Oh, about the same." She put on a guarded look, Maud observed.

"Not married yet?"

"Good heavens, no. And not likely to be. I'm glad you can stay, Maud. It'll cheer Nelson up to see you. He's depressed about the war."

"He thinks it's inevitable, does he?"

"You know how people are. Some days he thinks it's bound to come, and some days he thinks it isn't. I tell him it depends on the state of his liver." She took a cigarette from one of the great silver boxes,

which did not, after all, play a tune, and said as she lit it, "I know it's no good asking you to have one, Maud. Personally, I prefer not to think about the war. If it comes, it comes."

Maud laughed. "I hope your politicians aren't taking the same view."

"They may be for all I know," said Letty. "This is strictly between ourselves, but if war does come, plans are all made to change over Nelson's factories from making typewriters to making machine guns." She spoke with a little air of pride and importance.

"I suppose that would be bound to happen," said Maud, and added, "You seem to take the prospect of war very calmly."

"I don't see what I can do about it," Letty replied, and added, "Human nature's human nature, I suppose. There always have been wars, and there always will be. So why worry?"

There was something positively endearing, Maud thought, about Letty's trueness to type. She looked at her with an amused smile and was about to speak when Letty forestalled her with:

"I intend to drive an ambulance, if there is a war. The children can go to the country, probably to mother, in Gloucestershire, and we'll stay here. Nelson couldn't possibly leave London. They'd want him in the Ministry of Supply."

Maud wondered how much of London, should there be a war, would be left to live in. Finding the conversation unprofitable, she changed the subject.

"Tell me about the children. How are they?"

"Ivor's doing very well at Eton. Lucille's growing up; she'll soon be sixteen. She's at school in Switzer-

land, you know. She's taken to writing poetry lately. I don't know why I should be afflicted with a daughter who writes poetry, do you ? ”

“No, I don't,” said Maud with her robust laugh. “She must be a throw-back.”

“Well, it's very annoying,” Letty complained. “She isn't even pretty, she takes after Nelson's side of the family.” She added, “But I'm going to see that she's smart. It costs nearly as much to dress her as to dress me.”

Maud made no comment on this, which she thought not unlike the utterance of a certain type of American mother. But, she reflected, it was a type that knew no frontiers ; Letty was proof of that, if proof were needed. She merely said, “I'd be enchanted if a daughter of mine wrote poetry.”

“You wouldn't be if you hoped to marry her well.”

In those few words, Maud thought, Letty had packed the whole of her outlook on life, though they were spoken with her habitual air of pretty defiance. It was useless to take Letty seriously.

“You're quite incorrigible,” Maud said, “and you always were. Now tell me about Mary.”

There was a moment's silence during which Letty seemed to be considering how much she should tell.

“I hoped we could keep off that subject,” she said. “However, you're my oldest and best friend and I don't see why I shouldn't talk about her to you.” She paused again and Maud said :

“Well, then, go ahead. Don't make such a mystery of it.”

“Once I start on the subject of Mary,” Letty said,

"it's hard to stop me, so I don't often start. You know she's always been delicate."

"Yes. Isn't she any better?"

"Worse if anything. Nelson sends her to one doctor after another, but they don't seem to accomplish much. If we let her alone she'd just go into a decline the way girls used to do in early Victorian days. She doesn't seem to have any vitality at all."

"What about her music?" Maud asked. "She hasn't given it up, has she?"

"Since the accident she has. I told you about that, didn't I?"

"You wrote me that she and Lucille and Mlle. Drieux had been run into in a taxi, but I didn't know any of them were hurt."

"Mary was the only one, and it was her own fault, in a way. They were going to a concert at Queen's Hall. It was foggy, and Mary lowered the window to look out. She was nervous. She had her hand on the sill of the window and they were run into by another taxi. Her fingers got pretty badly smashed. Unfortunately, the right hand, though I suppose that for a pianist it doesn't matter much which hand it is. It was very bad luck indeed," Letty added, her voice musical with appropriate sympathy. "Very. But any other girl of her age," and here her voice altered, "would have pulled herself together and faced the thing. They did what they could for her—I can't tell you what Nelson paid out in doctors' and surgeons' bills—but they couldn't make her fingers as they were before. She could still play if she wanted to, but because she can't play as well as she did before, she won't look at the piano. I can't tell you what we've been through

with her in one way and another. First because we didn't take her music seriously enough, and because Nelson considered her too delicate to study abroad. I let her have the drawing room for three hours every morning, but no, she couldn't play here. The atmosphere wasn't right, or something. She could only practice at the School of Music. And I always encouraged her to play for my friends so that she'd get over being nervous. All I can say is, Maud, thank God I've no temperament. I've come to hate the very sight of a piano."

"But," Maud said, "Letty, this is a tragedy. The accident, I mean. I had no idea."

"It's been a tragedy all round, then," said Letty. "Don't imagine we haven't suffered. She's a hundred per cent. liability and I think it speaks pretty well for Nelson and myself that all this trouble with her hasn't affected our married happiness in any way. He knows I've done everything I possibly could for her."

"So your conscience is perfectly clear," said Maud.

Letty gave her a quick glance and said, "Absolutely."

"Poor Mary," said Maud. "I can't think of her apart from her music, somehow. I always picture her at the piano."

"Of course I don't happen to be musical," said Letty. "It was left completely out of my composition, and I'm thankful it was. If you knew what we've been through with that girl. The tears, the scenes, simply because Nelson wouldn't let her go and live in Paris alone. Of course she ought to marry; all her doctors have admitted to me that she'd be far better married. But she's warped or something. She won't look at a man."

"Won't look at a man?" Maud repeated. "But she did look at one. You told me so, in one of your letters. I think you said he was a barrister."

"Oh, that," said Letty, lighting another cigarette. "I forgot that I'd mentioned it. Yes, it started very well, but something happened. She bungled things somehow. She has no *métier de femme*. I'm afraid he just lost interest."

"Or possibly she did," suggested Maud, but Letty said:

"I rather think not. Of course since the accident to her hand she's been twenty times as difficult as she was before. One can understand that, up to a point. But after all, one must face up to these things. She gives way to nerves and depression; and those headaches. She gives in to them completely."

"I'd like to see her," Maud said. "Is she in the house now?"

"No, she went out this morning and hasn't been back." Letty paused, and then said, after a moment's silence, "What makes everything still worse is that she hates us. Or anyway, she hates me. If she has any affection for her father she certainly doesn't show it. She's fond of Ivor and Lucille, but no one else."

"She didn't use to hate you," Maud said.

"Well, she does now. She tries to hide it, of course, but the whole atmosphere's full of it. Nelson doesn't realise it, but I'm afraid it's simply because he can't believe that anyone could hate me. And, of course, I've been very good to her."

"Why doesn't she live by herself?" Maud asked.

"That's what I think she ought to do, of course," said Letty, "but Nelson simply won't hear of it. He

says that this house is so big it would be ridiculous for her to live in a flat of her own, quite apart from the fact that she's ill half the time. Besides, he doesn't trust her."

"Not trust her? What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say. He doesn't trust her not to turn against us completely. I know how he feels. It's like having a valuable dog and going to endless trouble and expense over his training and so on, and then seeing him attach himself to strangers or the servants and show his teeth when you go near him."

"What an unpleasant simile," said Maud. "I suppose she has her own friends, hasn't she? She must have friends."

"Very few. She doesn't like the people she meets here, and she makes no effort to meet other people. Well, we've talked enough about Mary. The whole subject bores me. Bores me to tears. How do you like this room, Maud? Or isn't it weird enough for your taste?"

Maud laughed and said, "It's quite weird enough."

"All right," said Letty with good humour. "I knew you wouldn't like it. I suppose you think it's too conventional. I love those lampshades. I've never seen any like them."

"Neither have I," said Maud.

"All right," Letty said again. "I don't care. I like them. You can't hurt my feelings. Come up and I'll show you my bedroom and my boudoir. Don't you think it's a lovely house?"

"Yes, I do," said Maud. "Did it have to be so big?"

"Well, you know Nelson likes plenty of space, and we do have to do a lot of entertaining. You see, one of these days Nelson's going into politics. I think the Conservative party needs men like him; vigorous, progressive men with ideas."

"I expect you're right about that," said Maud. "This staircase will be just the thing for your receptions. I can see you standing at the drawing-room door, graciously receiving the guests."

"That's one reason we bought it," said Letty, "because of the staircase, and the size of the drawing-room. Here's my bedroom. What do you think of it?"

Maud looked at the white walls picked out in gold, at the Du Barry rose carpet with its white fur rugs and at the hangings of deeper rose.

"It's very pink," she said.

"It's very French," said Letty. "And it isn't pink, it's *vieux rose*. It's my favourite colour."

"Well, you must have liked it," said Maud, "or you wouldn't have chosen it. It's all very handsome," she said, more generously. "You mustn't mind me. You know we never did like the same things. But it's a very handsome house."

Maud saw her own sober reflection wherever she looked in gilt mirrors of all shapes and sizes. The toilet set was of gold with "Letty" in a replica of Letty's own writing on each piece. On the walls were French colour prints such as are frequently found in hotel bedrooms, depicting amorous scenes. "It's just what I would have expected," she thought. "No one can teach Letty anything, and what she is, she is."

Opening out of the bedroom was a little boudoir,

also in old rose, white and gold, containing a small sofa, a painted writing desk and some chairs of the Louis the Sixteenth period, covered in fine needlework.

She was feeling the need of a cocktail by the time Nelson came home. He greeted her warmly and after a second's hesitation, kissed her cheek. Then they went into his study for drinks. This room had been given a determinedly masculine character. A huge cocktail cabinet first caught the eye; leather-covered arm-chairs, coloured sporting prints, smoker's requisites, and some swords and daggers carried on the theme. High, built-in bookshelves held soberly-bound books; for the most part, Maud thought, giving them a quick glance, dealing with the war; or the duller, post-war memoirs. On a broad writing table, handsomely equipped, was a large silver-framed photograph of Letty in her presentation gown, with her train wound about her feet. She was carrying an ostrich feather fan and looked pretty and self-conscious. On the other side of the table was an enlarged snapshot of Ivor landing a salmon from the bank of a stream, and Maud recalled that the summer before they had gone on a fishing trip to Norway. There were no photographs of Lucille or Mary.

She felt about Nelson much as she felt about Letty. She was fond of him in spite of a number of things. He took, as he always did, great trouble over the cocktails and rang for Shaw three times during the proceedings. Where, he wanted to know, was the bottle of orange bitters? How often had he told him——? Shaw produced the bottle from the back of the cabinet. Then he rang for a new washer for the cocktail-shaker which he said leaked. Finally, he wanted more ice.

There was an air of solemnity about the whole business which tickled Maud's sense of humour. Nelson might have been an alchemist of the middle ages working out a formula for the making of gold. When the cocktails were at last poured out and handed round he turned to Maud and said, raising his glass :

"Welcome home, Maud. Of all Letty's friends you're the one I'm most unfailingly glad to see."

"So you ought to be," said Letty, "as she's my best friend."

Maud thought Nelson had thickened and coarsened in the last two years. His face was more highly coloured, his neck seemed to have shortened. He was a big, rather barrel-shaped man, and she now detected a slight pomposity in his manner which struck her as new. She could see no grey in his thick dark hair and for the first time she wondered if he dyed it. His brown eyes, small but pleasant and frequently smiling, were a trifle close together; the fleshiness of nose and lips suggested a sensuality that his regular and ordered domestic life belied. (It was Letty's claim that she had found the perfect husband.) Yet to Maud there was something very likeable about him. Certainly he was far cleverer than Letty. She was always conscious, with Nelson, of reserves; of cards not on the table and not likely to be, for the simple reason that he was not communicative. She thought he had potentialities not yet employed, though she was not sure what they were. It was merely an impression. His conventionality came, she thought, less from conviction than from old habit. He had not troubled, or had been too busy, to exercise his imagination or put questions to himself. The death of a cousin had made him heir to his uncle's

business and to his uncle's not inconsiderable fortune, but he already knew that business from the bottom to the top, and had had time for little else. The making and selling of Hallam Typewriters had been his one objective, and now that Letty had told her of his political ambitions she wondered if she would have to revise some of her assumptions about him. She had regarded him as a highly successful business man with a horizon bounded on all sides by the demands of business. Now, it seemed, he was looking further afield. But the successful business man in politics, she reflected, remains very much what he was before. Nelson was unlikely to add much to his stature. "In that," she thought, "he and Letty are alike. Neither of them will learn anything more. What they are, they are."

He asked Maud how her mother was and wanted to know why she hadn't come over too. Maud explained that her aunt, her mother's only sister, had just been widowed and her mother had not liked to leave her so soon.

"So she came over with Lowell Pierce instead," said Letty mischievously. "I'm not sure she's nice to know."

"It would be more accurate to say he came with me," Maud remarked. "And may I remind you that it isn't for the first time?"

"Which makes it no better," said Nelson, smiling with his small eyes. "I'm not sure Letty isn't right, Maud. I'm not sure we oughtn't to disapprove of you."

Maud laughed and said: "Well, that's really very nice of you, Nelson. No one's disapproved of me for that kind of reason for so long that it's quite a treat."

"Couldn't he have come to dinner?" Nelson inquired.

Maud said that he was spending the day in bed. They'd had a rough crossing and he hadn't slept well. "He takes very good care of himself nowadays," she said.

"How's his heart?" Letty wanted to know.

"Much the same. He's going to see a new heart specialist when we get to Paris."

"Poor man," said Letty lightly.

"Are you flying over?" Nelson asked.

Maud shook her head. "I would, but I'm not sure it would be safe, for Lowell. If the 'plane had to fly high for any reason, I mean."

"How long are you going to stay in Paris?" Letty asked.

"About two months, I think. I've been asked to buy some paintings for the art gallery."

"Oh," said Letty, and made a little grimace. "I can imagine the sort of things you'll buy."

Maud smiled at her and said nothing, and Nelson remarked:

"One of your great virtues, Maud, is that you don't try to convert the unconvertible."

"I hope I'm not such a fool," she retorted.

A moment later he turned to Letty, and, with a troubled look which Mary did not fail to see, asked:

"Where's Mary? Why isn't she here?"

"She went out somewhere," Letty answered carelessly. "I don't know where. She didn't tell me."

"Didn't she know Maud was coming?"

"No, she slipped out this morning before I could tell her."

"Didn't she say when she'd be back?"

"She certainly didn't confide in me, darling. Perhaps Shaw knows."

Nelson at once went to the bell and rang for Shaw. Letty made a little movement as if she would have stopped him, perhaps to remind him that Shaw was probably busy in the dining-room, but abandoned the idea. Shaw came, with a patient look, and said, his eyes on the carpet, that Miss Hallam had not mentioned to him what time she would be back. She had only remarked that she would not be in for lunch. He withdrew, and Nelson's face darkened.

"I don't like her to go out without saying where she's going or when she'll be back. She knows it perfectly well."

"So do I, darling, but you'll have to speak to her," said Letty with a little laugh. "She's your daughter. And she's nearly twenty-four. There's nothing I can do about it."

He turned to Maud.

"We wouldn't worry about her like this," he explained, "except that she's so delicate. She's fainted twice lately. I don't know what's wrong with these doctors. They send in their bills all right, but they accomplish absolutely nothing." He looked irritated and ran his tongue over his lips, a sign, with him, of impatience, of having more to say than he would permit himself to utter.

"She seems to have been very unlucky, poor girl," said Maud. "I was really shocked to hear of that accident to her hand. Letty was just telling me. It's enough to throw anyone off their balance. And it was only about a year ago, wasn't it?"

"Not quite," said Nelson. "Still . . ." He moistened his lips again and added: "But no doubt we've made mistakes. She's a difficult girl to deal with. If only her general health would improve I'd be less worried."

"I want Nelson to try to persuade her to go to a psycho-analyst," said Letty.

"Modern magic," he said. "Hocus pocus. I don't want her to have anything to do with this Freudian business."

"Well, we've tried everything else," said Letty. "Personally, I'd love to be psycho-analysed. You talk about yourself for an hour a day every day for weeks. What could be pleasanter? It's better than going to a fortune-teller, and you know how I've always adored that."

Maud laughed and said she knew only too well. Completely unbelieving, Letty had long been in the habit of going from one fortune-teller to another and broadcasting among her friends what she had been told. "I can't think who the foreigner is I'm supposed to be going to *tromper* my husband with. I'd never dare *tromper* him with anybody. He keeps a gun in the house." Or, "She told me I had more sex appeal than anybody she'd ever met. What's the good of sex appeal when you never see anybody but your husband's business friends? I've always been taught that one shouldn't mix business with pleasure." And then, Maud remembered, she would look demure and say: "As it happens, I'm the most devoted wife in London."

Nelson looked at the clock.

"If she isn't in by eight——"

"Don't worry, darling," said Letty. "And give Maud another cocktail. She's panting for it."

He refilled Maud's glass and asked her how she liked the house.

"It isn't modernistic enough for Maud," said Letty.

"I don't know how you ever had the courage to buy it," Maud said, ignoring her; "it's so big. But it's a lovely house."

"Well, believe me," said Letty, "if there was any courage involved it was mine. I have to run it."

"So far," Nelson said, "Letty has had to entertain chiefly my business associates. Now the time's come, I think, to make a change. If we continue to avoid a war, and Europe gets back to normal again, Letty ought to be able to do the sort of entertaining she's always wanted to do."

"Well, it's chiefly for your sake, darling," said Letty, "that I've wanted to do it. If it didn't help you it would be pointless."

"Not if it amused you," he said.

Really, thought Maud, the Hallam team-work is almost too good. It alarms me.

The door bell rang and Nelson said: "There she is at last." There was a brief silence as Shaw went to the front door. They seemed to be listening for Mary's voice as people listen for a signal or a portent, but they heard nothing. Then the door of Nelson's study was opened a little wider, and Mary came in, slipping in quietly, with an air of being ready to slip quietly out again. She looked about her like a diffident stranger, at Letty, at her father, then at Maud. Her face was thin, her features sharpened by ill-health, her eyes were large and dark but they were lifeless, like a laid but unlit fire. Without a change of expression she went to Maud and said:

"Aunt Maud, how lovely to see you! O'Shaughnessy told me you were here."

Maud kissed her cold cheek and took a thin and awkward gloved hand.

"My dear," she said, "do you know it's three years since we met? You were away somewhere when I was over last."

"I know," said Mary. "When did you get here?"

"You would have heard all about it if I'd seen you this morning," said Letty, her voice carefully free from reproof.

Mary did not reply to this but said: "I'm sorry I'm late. I ought to have telephoned. I stopped at Grace's on my way home and my head was aching so badly that she made me take an aspirin and lie down."

"Another headache?" said her father.

"Yes," said Mary. "I'm sorry. I shan't want any dinner, Letty. I think I'll go straight up to bed if you'll all excuse me."

"Eva can take you up some soup," said Letty melodiously.

"I shan't want any, thank you." Her voice was toneless, formal.

"Well, I'll send it up and you can take it if you feel like it."

"Thank you," said Mary. "Shall I see you again, Aunt Maud? I hope so."

"I certainly hope so too," said Maud heartily. "I don't call this seeing you. Why don't you come and have lunch with Lowell and me on Friday? Come at one, if you're free. We're staying at the Downshire."

"Thank you, I'd love to," the girl answered, and she made an effort to put some warmth into her voice.

"Well, that's fine," said Maud, "and take care of yourself in the meantime."

Mary bade them a formal good night and turned and left the room. No good night kiss was offered and none, it appeared, was expected. Her going left a little, troubled silence. Then Nelson said, explosively:

"Really, these doctors are fools. Why can't they find out what's wrong with her? It isn't her lung now. What is it, then? The money I've spent, and absolutely no results."

"I don't think, myself, that Letty's idea is such a bad one," said Maud. "Why not try a psycho-analyst? Perhaps the trouble's mental rather than physical."

"Would you go to one yourself?" he demanded.

Maud laughed and said, "My dear Nelson, it's no good asking me that. I'm so normal I'm ashamed of it. A lot of my friends appear to think that because I'm a spinster I ought to be full of kinks and complexes, but all I can say is that if I've got any I'm just not aware of them."

"You've always known how to manage your life," Nelson told her.

"Not at all," she said. "I've always had money enough to do what I wanted, and the good health to enable me to enjoy doing it. I've been superlatively lucky."

"Well," said Letty, who was sitting very erect in her chair, and appeared to be waiting for a chance to speak, "what Mary needs is a psycho-analyst or a lover; it doesn't much matter which. If she's too spiritless to get herself a lover, we ought to see that she goes to a psycho-analyst."

"Letty's prescription for almost everything," said Nelson, "is a love affair," and though he smiled, his heavy, but by no means unattractive face seemed to darken.

"They change one's whole outlook and they're so good for one's appearance," Letty went on with the pretty perversity of a charming and indulged child. Shaw appeared in the doorway at that moment to announce dinner and vanished again, and she added as she got up: "Fortunately I don't feel the need of either remedy at the moment. But then I happen to be disgustingly happy." She kissed Nelson and with a sweet look at him took his arm as Maud preceded them into the dining-room. It was a large and long room panelled in light oak and looking, Maud thought, rather like the vestry of a new church except that on its walls were Victorian paintings of dead game. The modern refectory table of the same light oak looked capable of seating twenty people. Beyond it, in an alcove, a smaller table was set for them and lighted by electric candles in pink shades. "She hasn't asked me," Maud thought with considerable relief, "how I like the dining-room."

During dinner the situation in Europe and Mr. Chamberlain's efforts to maintain peace were discussed, and the words and phrases used by both Nelson and Letty seemed to Maud to be those in current use. Both said, without much conviction, what many of their friends were probably saying. Nelson, it seemed, still had hopes of Hitler. "He's crazy on one subject," he said. "The Jews. If it weren't for that I'd say let him go ahead and run Europe. No one else can."

"If there's a war, darling, how long do you think it will last?" Letty asked, playing up to him and assuming the rôle of the pretty woman who can be serious when occasion requires.

"Oh, three years at least would be my guess," he answered.

"Then Ivor may be in it," Letty said, but there was not a trace of maternal solicitude in her voice. "I want him to go into the Navy," she said. "He's so good-looking."

Maud turned to Nelson.

"Letty says she's going to drive an ambulance if there is a war," she said. "Do you approve?"

"I suppose Letty will follow her usual custom and do what she wants to do," he said. "I'd much prefer to send her to the country with Lucille. Ivor will stay at Eton, of course."

"And leave you here in London, which will probably be swarming with lovely young women in uniform?" Letty demanded. "Not likely."

"What I can't seem to get Letty to realize," he said to Maud, "is that the Germans are capable of blasting London off the face of the earth."

"Well, then, they'll have to blast me along with it," Letty said. "I'm not going to leave you. We'll get the basement reinforced and go to ground. I'll see to it this week. After all, the children have two grandmothers and a half sister. To say nothing," she added mischievously, "of a kind Aunt Maud."

"I suppose they'd be safe enough in the country," said Maud, with a responsive smile at Letty's reference to her.

"They'll have to take their chances like anyone else,"

Letty said. "It's no good pretending I'm one of those maternal women. I'm not. I'm perfectly devoted to my children, but my husband comes a long way first."

She flashed her big, blue-grey eyes at Nelson and Maud thought that in times of danger or crisis Letty would probably be very brave, though the cynical might doubt if she had sufficient imagination to be aware of the danger. And at the same time she realised that there are people who are stimulated by the thought of war and capable of extracting enjoyment from it when it came. Letty was evidently among their number.

"Well," Maud said, "the whole idea of it simply appals me. What a world we live in!"

"I suppose in another hundred years or so," Nelson said, "we'll have abolished war, or it'll have abolished us. About even chances I think."

"Why worry about what happens a hundred years from now, darling?" Letty asked. "We'll be so very dead. I'm not even worried about the war with Germany. We'll beat them."

"Then who'll beat the Russians?" Nelson asked, gloomily. "They're going to be the next menace to world peace."

"Oh, dearest, now you're just looking for trouble," Letty protested. "They can't fight."

When they returned to Nelson's study the subject of Mary came up again.

"I'm glad you asked her to lunch with you, Maud," Nelson said. "I wish you'd talk to her."

"What about?" Maud wanted to know. Nelson looked quickly at her; his small shrewd eyes had a slight reproach in them.

"Now Maud, I'm not going to suggest that you turn yourself into a kind of household spy. It's just that I wish you'd try to get at her; you know, find out what makes her tick—or find out why she doesn't tick. We can't. God knows we've tried to help her."

"Find a husband for her," said Letty lightly. "Or a lover."

Letty at her most insensitive and irritating, thought Maud, and addressed herself to Nelson.

"Why don't you let her come to Paris with us?" she suddenly heard herself saying. "Wouldn't that be a good idea?"

Nelson put down his brandy glass and looked at her in astonishment. Glancing at Letty, Maud saw an immense relief in her face, a wide-eyed and intense satisfaction.

"You can't mean it, Maud," Nelson said. "Why should you burden yourself with a delicate, neurotic girl you hardly know?"

"Oh, I don't believe she's as bad as all that," Maud said.

Nelson cleared his throat and replied, "Well, it's not my habit, as you know, to exaggerate. Still, I wouldn't stand in her way, if you really mean it. But I'd rather you thought it over."

"Darling," said Letty, "it's no good arguing with Maud. You ought to know that. She's just like her mother. She can never resist the temptation to do a kindness."

"I do know that," he said, "but she must do it with her eyes open."

"Oh, my eyes are always open," said Maud, and laughed her robust laugh. "Don't you worry about

that. She and Lowell can team up. He'll like having a nice-looking girl to take around."

"I'm bound to say, Maud," Nelson said, slowly, "that I think it's very generous of you. You realise, I suppose, that she may get ill."

"What's wrong with French doctors, darling?" Letty asked him.

"That's all very well, but Maud would have the care of her."

"Well, why look for trouble?" Maud asked. "The change would probably be good for her." Having made the offer, having committed herself, she was now quite determined to see the thing through.

"Anyway," said Letty, "I want to get her room re-painted. There was a leak in one of the pipes last month. It would give me a chance to have the workmen in."

"All right," said Maud. "The next question is, will she come?"

"Of course she will," Letty hastened to say. "It's only when suggestions come from us that she turns them down."

Fondling his brandy glass Nelson said, slowly, "It might be as well not to let her know that we've been discussing the idea. Could you make it appear that you've just thought of it, Maud, when you propose it to her? If she suspects collusion. . . ."

"Oh, you leave that to me," Maud said. "I can dissemble as well as the next person."

Half an hour later, glancing at the clock, she said, "I ought to get back to my invalid," and Nelson rang for Shaw. When he came in, Maud, looking at him, thought she was glad that someone in the house called

him O'Shaughnessy. He had a long, sad, equine face; everything sloped; head, forehead, chin, shoulders. It was as if the man were slowly melting. When the taxi came, Maud turned to Letty and said, "My coat and hat are upstairs, aren't they?"

"I expect Burroughs will have brought them down and put them in the hall," Letty answered, and Maud felt reproved, as if she had anticipated some hitch or failure in the perfect working of the house. She laughed and said:

"I might have known it. Well, tell Mary I expect her at one, on Friday, and she's not to let me down."

"What about a little dinner party for Maud and Lowell before they go?" Letty suggested, her arm through Nelson's. "Just eight or ten, as there's so little time. We haven't any high-brow friends, Maud, so don't expect a lot of people who can talk about Art."

"I know plenty of people who can talk about Art," said Maud, genially. "I'm with them all day long. But won't it be rather a rush, Letty? And we've only got Wednesday and Thursday free."

"Then we'll say Thursday," Letty said, "and I'll ring up Lowell in the morning. But you tell him he's got to come."

Maud had hoped to avoid a dinner party at the Hal-lams', but she saw there was no escape.

"He'll come all right," she said. "And thanks, Letty. It'll be lovely."

Nelson went to the door of the taxi with her, and Shaw, who was holding it open, stepped aside. Nelson kissed her cheek and said:

"I wish you were here oftener, Maud. You're very good for Letty. Good for both of us, in fact."

Her heart warmed to him. While putting on her coat in the hall she had been thinking, "One comes away full from some houses, empty from others. Now I'm coming away empty." The unmistakable sincerity of Nelson's words touched her. Had he, too, been aware of some lack? The rôle of plain business man which he so sedulously assumed, sometimes wore a little thin. Definitely there was more in Nelson than met the eye, but it was only apparent when one was alone with him, when he was off his guard. Did Mary ever see it? Probably not. Did she look for it? Again, probably not.

She sat in the taxi holding her absurd, smart little hat on her knee and wondered what had prompted her to offer to take Mary to Paris. Nothing could have been less premeditated. Lowell had once told her that she was sometimes drunk with power. "Because you *can* do a thing, you seem to feel you must," he had complained. "It becomes a vice." Well, it was a vice, she supposed, that she'd inherited from her mother. It was true that it gave one a slightly god-like feeling, and therefore was probably bad. Apart from that, surely there was little harm in it. In this case, Letty and that unhappy looking girl were obviously getting on each other's nerves; probably had long been on each other's nerves. And she knew well enough that Letty's capacity for imaginative sympathy was by no means large. She would be totally unable to put herself in the girl's place. Maud had not heard Mary play for more than five years; it was nearer six. It was difficult for her to judge, therefore, how bright a prospect had been blotted out in that accident in the fog. But whatever the facts, whether a great or a

lesser musical talent had been ruined that night, it had been a pretty tragic affair. The girl had been an ardent musician, had cared, it seemed, for little else. She had been considerably thwarted by ill-health and by a certain amount of discouragement—doubtless well meant—from her father and Letty. That accident coming on the top of it all must have wrought havoc, a havoc all the worse for being shut in and concealed from her little world. And what, Maud guessed, a very little world it was! Sadly limited and for the most part, it seemed, uncongenial. In asking the girl to go with Lowell and herself to Paris she would be taking a step in the dark, but she had rather a fondness for such steps provided they involved no violent consequences. In this case, should the three find themselves incompatible, the girl could surely be relied upon to withdraw and return home, and no harm done. The sensitive face, the nervous, apprehensive eyes certainly did not suggest the clinger or the bore, but rather someone who needed to be given assurance that she was wanted.

When she reached the hotel she took the lift up to the fourth floor where Lowell's room was. Her own was on the floor below. They usually engaged their rooms separately; not that anyone ever questioned their right to arrive and depart together or to have their meals together. It was a small convention to which they generally adhered. They used, and required, no subterfuges. They were old friends and had reached a time of life that surely placed them beyond any suspicion of impropriety, thanks partly to her own matronly appearance and to Lowell's delicate health and invalidish air. It was the second time they had

been to England and the Continent together, and it had worked very well. She knocked at his door.

Lowell was in bed, with a red dark silk dressing-gown about his shoulders. He had a book propped against his drawn-up knees and the reading lamp picked out high-lights on his round, nearly bald head. He had begun to go bald at thirty until nothing was now left but some mouse-coloured hair about the sides and back of his skull. His colourless moustache was thin and closely cut; his nose was fine, straight and fastidious. His brown eyes, unusually large for a man, were mild and seemed incapable of anger. His somewhat receding chin merged in his neck as he looked over his glasses at Maud and said :

“Back, Maudie? What was your evening like?”

She was reminded with a vividness that made her smile, of her mother. Mrs. Cotter never went to sleep, in the old days, until Maud had returned from her parties. It might have been her mother now, saying, “Back, Maudie? What was your evening like?” She would sit down on her mother’s ugly old mahogany bed and tell her what sort of evening it had been; how her friends had looked, what the refreshments had been and, above all, who had paid her special attention, for Mrs. Cotter was very pressing about these details. Often enough in those days, Lowell had been her escort. He was built solidly into the fabric of her family life. He could be, when she wished him to fill the part, friend, brother, even mother. Now, at this moment, he was her mother and she felt a warm and amused affection for him as he looked over his glasses at her, as companionable as any woman, but so much more useful as an escort, for she disliked dining

with women in restaurants, or seeing other women dining together. She knew her prejudice to be illogical and out of date, but it was not to be overcome.

She sat on the foot of his bed and began to tell him about the evening in Hyde Park Square. He had met the Hallams perhaps half a dozen times and brought to bear on them his own humorous and sometimes caustic scrutiny. He thought Letty a kind of Becky Sharp with a dash of Madame Bovary. When Maud had described the house to him he said :

"What fun they get out of their money I don't know. Letty's opposite number at home would have been adventurous enough to buy Matisse's and Picassos whether she liked them or not, just to be in the swim."

"Nelson wants to establish himself firmly," Maud said, "and then go into politics. He's building up something, and he isn't going to be hurried. You know his family were quite poor and lived somewhere in the outer suburbs. He didn't go to one of the English public schools, and I think that's why he was always so determined that Ivor should go to Eton. The one asset the family had was Nelson's father's elder brother Alfred Hallam, who appears to have been a go-getter and more than middling clever. Nelson means to get on in the world, and he's working to a definite blueprint. Letty's contributing her share in her own way. Probably she's the right wife for him, though just now and again I have my doubts."

"I gather from what you say," Lowell remarked, "that they suit each other well enough. As perhaps you know, I divide people roughly into two classes; those who live with an eye on their immortal souls and

those who don't. The Hallams belong conspicuously, in my opinion, to the latter class."

"Well," said Maud, with a laugh, "you can suit yourself, I suppose, about the way you classify people, and that's as good as any. By the way, which class do you belong to?"

"I give a great deal of thought to my immortal soul," he said, falling in with her bantering tone, a tone they frequently made use of when talking together. "You ought to know it if anybody does."

"I've seen remarkably few signs of it," she retorted. "The only one I can recall at the moment is that quotation from Emerson you had framed and hung on your bedroom wall when you were eighteen or nineteen. 'Build thee more stately mansions, oh my soul.'"

"I still don't know of a better precept," he said.

She laughed again at a recollection:

"Mother saw it one day and told your mother she hadn't realised that you wanted to be an architect. She swears now that she never said anything of the sort, but your mother always vowed she did."

This brought an answering smile from him and then he said:

"I was thinking to-night how I'd love to go back to those old days. How good they were, Maudie! How good! How narrow, self-satisfied, kindly, decent, affectionate most of us were! What fun we had, of a snobbish, innocent sort. How convinced we were that we knew all the answers. Take it all in all, how happy we were!"

"Poor old Lowell!" she exclaimed, patting his feet. "You've been having one of your fits of nostalgia, have you? I oughtn't to have gone out and left you."

"I was content enough here," he said. "I like this hotel. The maid who came up to turn down my bed told me she'd been here for thirty years and the hall porter's been here for over fifty."

"I thought you'd like it," Maud said. She saw him fingering his book and changed the subject. "Lowell, you remember, don't you, that Nelson has a daughter by his first wife who died?"

"I seem to remember," he said. "I don't think I ever met her, did I?"

"Yes, you did. You've forgotten. When we were dining one night at the house in Kensington she came in and played the piano. She played Chopin and was very nervous, but she played uncommonly well."

"Yes, now I remember," he said. "A thin, dark young girl, not bad looking."

"She's delicate, poor child," said Maud, "and I guess she's pretty unhappy there with Letty all over the place. They mix like oil and water. I'm going to ask her to come over to Paris with us unless you've got some good reason why we shouldn't ask her."

"What, me?" The invalidish man looked round at her with an air of humorous surprise. "Since when have you begun looking for objections or even opinions from me? I've no doubt the thing's already settled and she's got her trunks packed. Well, she'll be your responsibility, not mine."

"Oh," she laughed, "I'd hardly expect you to make yourself responsible for her. Seriously, Lowell, tell me if you hate the whole idea."

"I don't particularly hate it. You know I don't like young girls. They make some men of my age feel young, but they make me feel a hundred."

"Well, she's not exactly a young girl. She's twenty-three or four. And she's had her troubles." She told him about the accident in the taxi. "I don't suppose Letty realises in the least what it meant to her."

"She wouldn't be Letty if she did," he remarked. Then he asked, "Has she been to Paris before?"

"Once or twice, with Letty and Nelson."

"Oh. That's to say she hasn't been." Then he asked, "Why hasn't she married?"

"Her health's been wretched. She's always being ill."

He said, polishing his glasses, "One of those vicious circles, I suppose. She's ill because she hasn't married and she hasn't married because she's ill."

"You talk like Aunt Chloe in some girls' magazine," she told him. "You can go into that question with her when we're in Paris."

"I'll do nothing of the sort." He put on his glasses and picked up his book again. "It's time you went to bed."

"I'll go in a minute. First I want to know what to do. I told Letty and Nelson I was going to ask her, but I haven't mentioned it to the girl herself. I won't if you don't want me to."

"What's her name?" he asked.

"Mary. She's very quiet and peaceable."

"Let her come by all means. It's in the true Cotter tradition. Who am I to object? Besides, I'm sorry for her if she has to live with Letty."

"I don't suppose she has to, really. Or she wouldn't have to if her health weren't so bad. She made me think of a bird with a broken wing."

"Why on earth you seem to feel responsible for that family, you and your mother, beats me. It isn't as if they were paupers."

"Letty and her mother were when we first knew them."

"That's a long time ago, and Letty has certainly done well for herself in the meantime. So has her mother, hasn't she? Didn't she marry a likeable sort of school-master. Why all this Lady Bountiful business? Why can't they look after their own affairs?"

"You never liked Letty," Maud said.

"I don't dislike Letty. She's got what it takes to get on in the world and she's pleasing to the eye."

"Once you've got yourself involved in other people's lives," Maud explained, "it isn't easy to cut yourself off from them. The person who helps is always under a greater obligation than the person who receives the help. I don't know why, so don't ask me. And mother's awfully fond of Letty. You know, she calls mother Aunt Lou and treats her like a contemporary, and she adores it. I suppose I'm fond of Letty, too, in a way. She bores me and she irritates me, but she's a part of my life and I'm attached to her. You'd be just the same. You know perfectly well how you go on seeing people just because you always have seen them. We're like that."

"Yes," he said, "we're like that, I suppose. Has it got to go on to the third and fourth generation? What are you going to do for the Hallam children? Make them your heirs?"

"I don't think they'll need any help from me, alive or dead," Maud said. "Well, look, I'll tell you what we'll do. I won't say a word to Mary till we've seen her

at lunch on Friday. You may take a dislike to her and our stay in Paris would be ruined."

"Don't let me interfere with any of your benevolent schemes. I suppose I'm one of them myself. Now go to bed, Maudie. You've no business in my room at this hour."

"I thought it was all right up to midnight," she said.

He lifted his eyebrows, wrinkling his high, bare forehead.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. Then he added: "Oh, Maudie, open my window before you go, will you? Then I won't have to get out of bed."

She pulled his window down from the top, thinking how often she had performed this little act for her mother, and then said, wiping her fingers on her handkerchief:

"Nelson seems pretty certain there'll be a war."

"Maudie," he protested, "when we decided to come over here you promised we wouldn't keep talking about a war, that we'd just enjoy ourselves. It's my last trip to Europe, war or no war——"

"Nonsense," she interrupted him.

"And it may be yours, too. Besides, he doesn't know any more about it than that coloured boy, Saul, who looks after your furnace at home and said there wouldn't be a war."

She laughed and turned to the door. "Well, good night, grumpy. I'm lunching at the Savoy to-morrow with Accrington, the art critic. Join us, if you like. It's my party."

"All right," he said, "if I haven't anything better to do."

She closed his door softly and went down to her own room. She really must try to keep that promise, she thought, not to talk about the likelihood of war. Lowell simply couldn't endure the thought of it. Well, no more could she, though she found it hard not to talk about it. It was like a riddled, ghastly corpse flung into a ballroom among the dancers and the lights. It was utterly obscene. The thought was intolerable to the mind of the modern Anglo-Saxon; or, if it came to that, to the modern French mind; she knew well enough what the French were thinking. On the other hand, she knew a few people here and there like Letty, to whom war itself was a challenge, an opportunity for exhibiting a certain sort of courage. People who didn't think, who were not capable of thought, and who, when they felt, felt atavistically. Such people were rare in the countries bordering on the Atlantic. How many there might be in other countries, she could not guess. But probably Letty was only showing off. That remark about Ivor was surely just showing off. She knew Letty. It was a pose. One could even find something to admire in her if one knew that she loathed war and understood what it meant. If not, her attitude was outrageous. Well, why worry about her? She was what she was. She suddenly remembered that she'd forgotten to warn Lowell that Letty was going to give a dinner party for them, and she'd be ringing up first thing in the morning, probably. Oh, well, let Lowell get out of it if he wanted to. She couldn't, she'd have to go. She couldn't hurt the Hallams' feelings. She knew that Letty, whatever her faults, was genuinely fond of her, and affection begets obligation.

She went to the cupboard to hang up her black dress and coat, wearing a white silk slip and fine dark nylon stockings. Her vigorous, greying hair was cut fairly short and the ends were curled up, loosely. Everything she did, everything about her suggested strength, purpose, common sense, reasonableness. It was pleasant, she thought, to be here again, and with Lowell. They only disagreed about minor matters, about which it was amusing to argue. Dear old Lowell. She was very, very fond of him.

Her friends and family took it for granted that but for Lowell's disastrous illness at nineteen, the attack of inflammatory rheumatism from which he had so nearly died and which had so impaired his heart, they would have married, and married young. Well, she thought, as she had thought many times before, let them think it. What did it matter now?

Everything had been altered on that summer day years ago when he had played six sets of strenuous tennis and then, having mislaid his coat and refusing to borrow Bart's, had driven himself home in his Winton Six a distance of twenty miles in the evening dew and damp. She had watched him drive off; had played the last three sets as his partner; had called after him, furiously: "Come back, Lowell, you idiot! You'll catch your death. Take Bart's coat." He had waved his hand and gone one. Her mother had taken a house that summer on Cape Cod, the Pierces had also taken one not very far away. Thanks to Lowell's Winton Six they saw each other daily. She could recall the scene as though it had happened the week before. Could see herself standing looking after him, as the sun went down, wearing her white starched tennis

dress, the skirt to the ankles, and a lingerie hat to protect her face. A big, strong girl, fond of sports, a good tennis player, on happy and easy terms with numerous young men, her own and Bart's friends, but stubbornly liking Lowell the best; angry with him for not paying the slightest heed to her warnings and for fighting her off when she tried to put Bart's coat about his shoulders. Well, Providence, she had often told herself, doubtless had its own purposes, though in the words of the Scotchwoman, often quoted by her mother, "Providence is whiles the better for a bit of guidance."

The alteration in Lowell's life and character was inevitable and rapid, but he was no peevish invalid. He accepted all the implications of his delicate health with a sweetness and even a readiness that amazed his friends. To Maud, who knew him best, it was not altogether surprising. Young though she was, she had already detected in him a certain dread of the demands that might soon be made upon him. It showed itself in various ways; chiefly in his reluctance to decide on a career. She had observed, too, his lack of ease when in the company of pretty and highly sexed young women—the sort of girls Bart and his friends called "peaches." Only with herself was he completely natural. Though a "dashing" tennis player, he disliked all rougher sports and showed a fondness for reading that was rare indeed in their circle. Now he could indulge his idiosyncrasies to the fullest extent, and did so. A freshman at Harvard at the time of his illness, he was advised by his doctors not to return there, and so continued his studies with tutors in his own home. There had been few exchanges of sentiment between Maud and himself either before or after

the event that changed his life. He continued to be her escort to dances, though he did not, of course, dance, and she left them early on his account. He became a second brother to her and a far more dependable one than that mercurial extravert, Bart. He became, in fact, more and more dependent on her, and she, inexhaustibly kind and tolerant, let him believe that she was equally dependent on him. Little by little he entered once more into the social life of Boston, and, more important to him at that time, its intellectual life. At forty, however, he announced that he was weary of the latter and that only the former now interested him. His mind, she knew, easily grew tired, and he fell back upon the merely amusing. He had many friends, though she was always friend-in-chief. He became like an urbane monk, entertained and stimulated by contact with his fellows and as fond of gossip as a fishwife. Maud often told him that he could have written good, gossipy novels, and he might have done so had he been touched, even lightly, by the spur of poverty, but his parents died leaving him well off and he was content to watch the world go by, to collect early American furniture for a house he had bought—though he could not make up his mind to live in it—near Stockport, and to interest himself mildly in scientific research. Maud knew him better than she knew herself. She knew every corner of his life; almost, she thought, of his mind. It was his belief that he knew hers, and the fact that he did not was responsible for the one flaw in her relations with him, and for the guilty feeling that had troubled her for years in regard to him. She had kept from him—as indeed she had from everyone, with a single exception—the most important event in

her life. It was highly improbable that he would ever find it out unless she herself were to tell him; nevertheless the uncertainty as to how he might be affected by it if he were to know, teased her and was much in her mind.

By all the rules, this piece of private history should have been discovered long ago. That it was not, in such a closely knit society as that of Boston and within their own comparatively small circle, was extraordinary. At twenty-four she had fallen in love with a well-to-do Bostonian known to all of them, who was married and the father of four children. He told her that though he no longer loved his wife he would never seek a divorce. Maud accepted this barrier to her total happiness and though she suffered greatly with intervals of fearful and inordinate joy, they were lovers for over ten years.

In response to a certain affectionate misconception as to her musical talent on the part of Mrs. Cotter, Maud took singing lessons from a Spanish ex-opera singer named Madame Montez. The singer, because her neighbours objected to the sounds inseparable from the giving of lessons, rented an apartment for that purpose not far from her house. When the lessons were over for the day, usually at four o'clock, the apartment was empty. Maud made Madame Montez her confidante—her only confidante—and, as she anticipated, the singer gave her her sympathy and presented her with a duplicate key to the apartment. Here Maud's emotional life, all that ever came her way, was lived with an intensity and a depth of feeling that made it a life within a life. Always outwardly self-possessed, good-humoured, calm, her friends and family saw no change

in her and guessed nothing. The fact that she was deceiving those near and dear to her gave her few if any twinges of conscience. She loved them devotedly and in all her relationships she was loyal and sincere. She scarcely knew her lover's wife, but only in relation to her was she doubtful of the rightness of her behaviour, for she could never quite convince herself that the breach between Martin and Janet Brewster might not in time have healed did she herself not so entirely possess him.

In the end the tragedy was hers rather than Janet's, for Martin Brewster died at the age of forty-four after a lengthy illness, during which he was dutifully cared for by his wife and inaccessible to Maud. It seemed to Maud that the agony she then suffered was the punishment she had to bear for her illicit happiness. Grief, and a grief which had to be hidden, aged her and added years to her already mature appearance. She never fell in love again, nor wished to. All that was over. She was "good old Maud," a good friend, and excellent company. Men did not think of her as a possible wife, and she accepted this fact with gratitude. Martin Brewster had completely absorbed and dominated her, and during the ten years that their love affair had lasted, she took her views and preferences from him. Her interest in pictures had been first aroused by him. He had bought in Paris as a young man—a young man with money and a *flair*—a magnificent Manet, two portraits by Ingres, an early Corot, a Van Gogh and a Sisley, and with these as a foundation he built up a small but admirable collection of nineteenth-century French paintings. As his wife took no interest in them whatever, and it would have been invidious to have

bequeathed them to Maud, he left them in his will to a Boston art gallery where they were contained in a specially built wing and known as the Martin Brewster Bequest. With this bequest went the proviso, privately agreed upon, that Maud was to be made curator and buyer for the Collection, a fund being allocated for this purpose. Maud's interest in and knowledge of French painting was well known to her friends, who were not at all surprised that the choice of the Trustees should have fallen upon her. Her annual visits to European art galleries and her preoccupation with the subject of French Impressionism made the choice seem natural enough. She had few ties, was well off, and could travel as and when she pleased. Also she had for some years been writing articles for the *Amateur Collector*. Her appointment, therefore, caused no particular comment, and there was nothing whatever to connect her name with that of the dead man. She was now well known to dealers and had built up a reputation for herself as something more than an enthusiastic amateur ; as a shrewd buyer, a skilful bargainer and a good judge.

She knew that Janet Brewster had preceded her to England with one of her daughters, and that she might easily run across her. In Boston their acquaintance had never ripened but remained infertile, static. A closer acquaintance was the last thing that Maud desired and it suited her well that Janet should not only be wholly ignorant of her relations with Martin but that she should also be quite indifferent to herself. Sometimes they gave each other a nod of recognition ; still more often they contrived not to see each other, as people who do not intend to become friends will often do, by unspoken and mutual consent. But a meeting

here, Maud feared, might have different results. Conceivably Janet might welcome an encounter with two fellow Bostonians and discussion of mutual friends at home, and this Maud was determined to avoid. Even had circumstances been other than they were, she and Janet Brewster would have had little in common.

She folded up her clothes neatly and got into bed. *The Times* lay on her bedside table and she opened it and studied the list of art exhibitions before switching off the light. She then turned comfortably on her side and crossing her arms on her breast, uttered a silent, humble yet urgent prayer for those she loved, living and dead, and fell asleep.

2

LETTY placed such emphasis upon the importance of looking one's best that it gave Mary a perverse pleasure to take little trouble about her appearance. In any case, she thought, it didn't matter very much what she wore. No one was likely to look at her, and it was her wish to be sufficiently inconspicuous to escape notice, favourable or unfavourable. Her usual wear was a loose tweed coat worn over a simple and serviceable dress, and a beret. She had four berets, one of them red, and this one she wore when she went to lunch with Maud. She got out of the house without Letty's seeing her, for Letty would certainly have tried to persuade her to change the tweed coat for a short fur coat she had lately given her—one that she herself had worn and grown tired of—and the beret for a large, black Breton sailor which turned up all the way round and was fashionable that year.

The day was the mildest of the season, so far, and the sun had unexpected warmth. As Mary had time in hand she decided to walk to the Downshire, and she was almost dazzled by the sun. It caressed her face, her eyelids were bombarded by it, she felt it lie warmly against her mouth, she felt it penetrate to her very heart. But she was not deceived. The sunlight was a cheque which would not be honoured; it was a promissory note given her by a bankrupt. It raised hopes which could not be fulfilled. The sun was the sun; it was

not a portent of more life, more love, more happiness. It was heat and it was nothing more. She cut through the park and saw the budding trees, the opening leaves of the lilac ; she saw the daffodils and thought that had she been there an instant earlier she might have heard their shout of joy, which even now seemed to tremble on the air. But she was not deceived.

The night before she had had one of her recurrent dreams, a dream which never failed to cast a deep shadow on the day that followed, and sometimes on subsequent days. It was the dream of lost spring. She had been looking forward to the spring with a longing that, she knew, was more than a mere longing for the darling season ; it was a longing to which a hundred other longings attached themselves. It was a longing to possess the spring by matching it with her private happiness, and so meet fullness with fullness, and loveliness with love. Without this, the darling season reproached her, repulsed her and would not let her enter in, and she remained hungry at its gates. And each year her fears that she would once again be found wanting by the spring, brought about the dream ; the dream that spring had somehow overtaken her and passed on, and before her yearning eyes had turned to dried leaf and sere, burnt grass and dust. In her dream she recognised the same disaster that had overwhelmed her before, and her whole being cried out in anguish and in protest : " You've let it go by again ! You've lost it again ! It's gone, and you've had none of it, not a bud, not a flower of it." And in her dream her heart had broken with disappointment and chagrin.

Once again the spring was here, and once again she was not ready ; once again she was tortured and

haunted by the dream. She knew what she would do ; she would do what she had done in other years. She would go into the country, down into the cherry orchards of Kent, or into the beechwoods of Buckinghamshire, or among the blossoming thorn in the hollows of the Sussex Downs. Morbidly in love with spring and the pain it gave her, she would come back again with empty hands and unsatisfied heart. These pilgrimages she made with her friend Grace Lovell, in Grace's small car. They were old schoolmates, tolerant of one another but as separate as islands. Grace went because Mary wanted to go. She took her sewing or a book, she drove the car, she studied the maps. She was used to Mary's moods, to her silences, to her despair, knew she hated Letty and hated her own hate, knew she tired herself out at the piano in the belief that too much time had already been lost and that she must make it up or fail utterly. After the accident Grace had been half afraid to see her, had dreaded what she would find. Mary, knowing this, had written to her : " You don't have to say anything. I can bear it if only no one will say anything." She went in dread of well-meant words, feared them and shunned those who might utter them. As she walked to the hotel, the shadow of the dream was upon her and spring was upon her, and she would have to go and take what she could of it, even though, to the starved, a banquet can be lethal. It was time to ring up Grace, to go down into Kent, to see, against the sky's aloof, curved and awful blue the cherry trees' arms upflung and sleeved in white ; a sight to ravish, a sight to kill.

And now she was going to try to make herself acceptable to two nice people who meant nothing to her.

"Aunt" Maud, Letty's friend, whom she could have liked warmly but that she was Letty's friend; and Letty's friend's friend, the baldish man she remembered on that nightmare evening when she had been sent for to play to them, and had played Chopin, at the baldish man's request, and played as if her fingers had been turned into little hammers. She had not forgotten that, though it was years ago. "Aunt" Maud was a family institution, a recurring phenomenon of her childhood and early girlhood, sometimes seen and sometimes not seen but only heard of. A person who shed ease about her, who was natural and of the earth, the good earth, not a thing of pavements and carpets, like Letty. Should Letty die, it was impossible to think that the earth would ever receive her. No, ashes for Letty, and a marble urn. But what was she to think of "Aunt" Maud, who was Letty's friend? That she was a person without insight or discrimination? But that was not, as it happened, true. She knew it was not true. Easy to feel contempt for most of Letty's friends, but not for this one. The explanation, for there must be one, eluded her. She might find it to-day. Women like Maud Cotter were not won by the pinchbeck charm of other women. That was for men's undoing. "Aunt" Maud, robust, genial and no one's fool, must have another reason for being Letty's friend.

She looked about her for a clock, saw one, and slackened her pace. There was plenty of time. She depended on chance clocks and an inner time-consciousness, possessed only by the apprehensive, because she could never remember either to wear or wind a watch. She walked slowly, caressed by the sun, and took stock of her situation. Seen from outside, she knew she

would be judged fortunate. She could dismiss that outside judgment with an ironic smile. Those who did not know, did not know. Seen from the inside, her life possessed the single redeeming feature, if indeed it redeemed anything, of being secure. She would neither starve nor freeze, and food and warmth would come to her without effort on her part. So much to the insufficient dubious good. Apart from that, the scene was like the opening scene of "Macbeth"—a blasted heath and three witches. She could name them: Hate, Frustration, Despondency. Three charming girls.

Her Mentor, her other, commenting and watching Self, had sometimes said to her, "Get rid of the first and the other two will vanish." A palpable lie, and anyway, unfeasible. Get rid of hate? It was in her very blood stream. She had disliked Letty from the first moment that her childish eyes had rested upon her. It was not jealousy. Her father could have taken ten wives for all it would have mattered to the nurse-conditioned child. Her mother had been dead three years and was a most uncertain memory; a memory blurred by dreams, by imaginings, by the stories she presently began to read, and by the talk of nurses who, never having seen her mother, conjured her up for their own purposes. Indeed, indeed, her father could have had ten wives had none of them been Letty. Antipathy; who can explain it? She shrank from the touch of Letty's hand, she shrank, inwardly shuddering, from her casual and perfumed kiss. In her illnesses she prayed that Letty might not come to her room. In her griefs she prayed that Letty might offer no words of consolation.

Then music, the very stuff of life to the developing

girl, a boring noise to Letty, washed like a sea between them. Her father was indifferent to it (recognising and liking only Handel's *Largo* and Liszt's *Liebestraum*), and was not particularly disturbed by his daughter's passion for it. Only when she talked of making it a career did he grow impatient. Her health was so unreliable as to make nonsense of such aspirations; and anyway, who not leave musical careers to ugly and impoverished Jewesses? She was going to be an attractive young woman with money behind her. The career for her was marriage.

The fight was long and bitter. As if to prove her father right her health declined still more, until she was sent to Switzerland with the threat of a tubercular lung forcing her submission. Two years were spent there, two—from the point of view of music—utterly wasted years. Back again to the piano and to her lessons she came, with dogged determination. Then she made up her mind that she must make another bid to go to Paris to study. Here her father angrily pronounced the subject closed. He was sick and tired of it, he said. The trouble with her lung would break out again, all the good the two costly years in Switzerland had done her would be undone. There was nothing more to be said.

Possibly he was right, but she would gladly, joyfully have taken the risk. And as if once more to justify him, her health improved a little, the healing of the lung proceeded satisfactorily; with care, the doctors said, there would be no more to fear from that quarter, but she must be sensible and take no chances.

So she was sensible. She cut down her hours of practising, fearfully at first, then with a growing

confidence for she seemed to be gaining ground in spite of lost years, in spite of all obstacles. She was growing more and more attached to Lucille and Ivor; Lucille because she was intelligent and affectionate and resembled Letty not at all; Ivor because he was like Letty to look at and made nonsense of the likeness in transcending her. So promising a boy could be forgiven even for adoring Letty. And when these two were in the house, her lot was bearable and sometimes more.

She was nearly at the hotel and it was still too early, so she paused to look into a florist's window but saw only pictures from her own past. She searched for happy ones, as the unhappy will; scenes with which to comfort herself when there was comfort from no other quarter. The best period had been, she thought, just before the accident; it had been a hopeful period, however much she had been on the stretch, drawn out painfully in her race between accomplishment and the obstacles to that accomplishment. And then the accident, arresting all hope, all motion; zero overnight and the moving waters of her life stilled. She had asked the brisk young surgeon when her hand was taken out of plaster:

"Is it really all over? Shall I never play again?" His answer had been, with a surgical, cruel-to-be-kind look at her, "There are compositions for the left hand, I believe."

Her father urged a cruise with her friend Grace Lovell, Letty a three months visit to Maud Cotter in Boston. She declined them both. The shy girl who had been too absorbed in her music to contemplate any other life, now saw but one possible route for herself

out of this bitter, freezing wasteland: a husband, a home, a child. These might fill a vacuum that seemed to her otherwise without limit. She chose this way back to life as a frightened prisoner, plotting freedom in spite of his fears, chooses his best way of escape. She set herself painstakingly and anxiously to the task of finding the first requisite, a husband, and for this she had to alter herself, adopt a completely new rôle, study the ways of girls who had never had any other objective but a husband. Even her father, not an observant man, noticed the change in her with thankfulness; Letty saw it with amusement tinged with contempt. It was a little late in the day, she thought, for the girl to come to her senses. She was sorry for Mary in her way but she thought her despair childish and spiritless. "You can use your hand perfectly well for everything but the piano," she told her, "and even for that it isn't useless. You can play simple things, like dance music, can't you? And good heavens, you can write, sew, knit, do your hair, untie knots. You don't realise how lucky you are."

What would Maud Cotter, Letty's friend think, Mary wondered, if she knew about Ferdinand Walsh? What would she think of that story? But no one knew, no one would ever know.

Encouraged by Mary's changed attitude towards men, Nelson one night brought home to dinner, at short notice, a young barrister who had lately won a case for him, a complicated case involving infringement of patent. Heretofore, Mary's reply to her father's and Letty's war against her musical career was to be coldly indifferent to such marriageable men as she met in that house, though away from home her attitude towards

them was somewhat kindlier and more human. Ferdinand Walsh was a tall man in the early thirties, with the striking, heavily marked eyebrows so common among comedians and members of the Bar. These impressive, forensic eyebrows arched above a forthright nose and a pair of clever, highly observant dark eyes. It was the perfect face for a barrister's wig. He had an easy, elegant way of lounging in a chair or on a sofa, and handled his long legs and arms with grace and confidence; and yet in spite of the easy grace there was a look of ruggedness too, and a total effect of beauty of a manly sort. Mary thought there was something of the actor in him, but this did not displease her, this helped to conquer her; and she could not have said whether his mind or his personality attracted her most. She was more than attracted; she was deeply fascinated, a thing which had not happened to her before. She could not look away from him; she could not look at him enough. He seemed to feel at home there; the great house did not daunt him, and he enlivened what might well have been a dull evening, for good talk was not often heard at the Hallams'. Letty, charming and girlish in a lovely dress of grey-blue silk, sparkled, Nelson, pleased by the success of his guest, relaxed and lost some of his stiffness, and his habit of critical watchfulness. Mary, like most shy people who are determined to overcome their shyness, sometimes startled by her outspokenness. She knew she overshot her mark at times, but was not disposed to care, for her mood now was nearer to desperation than to caution. So absorbed was she in her own feelings, in her own shy, desperate plans, that she did not know that in the first hour of that evening the relations between Letty

and herself had altered. They were attracted to the same man. They had become rivals.

After dinner when they went into the drawing-room—did he, Mary wondered, think it as dreadful as she did?—he strode to the piano, looked at the maker's name and said, "A Bechstein! Who plays it? Do you play, Mrs. Hallam?"

Letty looked up at him and laughed. The quick upward turn of her head was birdlike, and there was something birdlike in her face, with its small, aquiline nose, something birdlike, pretty and yet fierce.

"I?" she cried. "Good heavens, no! I'm not musical in the very least. I've no temperament. It's my stepdaughter who's the musical one."

(And the fool, she seemed to say; the silly, muddled fool, who doesn't know what women are for. No, no, thank you very much, I'm not in the least like that!)

He turned to Mary, perfectly aware of undertones. This shy daughter of the house in the simple flowered dress, with a small fur wrap about her shoulders, this delicate-looking girl who yet made her presence felt, who was almost startlingly distinct and apart from the other two, was the musical one. He had already guessed as much. The dreaded question was on his lips. Nelson, as a rule, warned new visitors that his daughter had recently had an accident, crippling her hand. He had not warned this one and waited in some suspense when Walsh said, urgently:

"Oh, please play, do, please! If you will, perhaps I shall be encouraged to play, too. I'm an amateur of amateurs, but I love it. We'll have a musical evening."

Mary looked at him unflinchingly and slowly ex-

tended her hand palm upwards, like a beggar, showing the scarred fingers that would not straighten.

"I can't play now. I injured my hand. I was going to be a professional pianist, but that's all over."

With an exclamation he took her hand and examined it, bent his striking head and frowning great eyebrows over it.

"Good God! What a shame! What a tragedy! How did it happen?"

"It was a taxi accident."

He let go her hand and in his face she saw a sympathy that for once caused her no pain. On his actor's face it was vivid.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am. Ought I to have seen? You use your hand so very cleverly, no one would notice. How brave you are!"

She shook her head. With the eyes of the other two on her she said, like a remorseful child, suddenly cleansed of her naughtiness:

"I'm not brave at all. I took it very badly." She got up and went to the music cabinet. "What will you play?"

"No notes," he said. "I play mostly from ear. I told you I was the veriest amateur." He sat down on the piano bench. "I'll play something I'm sure you don't play, so as not to offend your ear. I'll start with the waltz from the *Rosenkavalier*, just to loosen up my fingers. I haven't touched a piano for days."

He ran his big hands easily and lightly over the keys. The room became gay with his music, and Nelson resisted an impulse to move his head, to keep time with the rhythm of the waltz.

"If only Mary had played this sort of thing," he

thought, "instead of all that Bach and stuff that nobody wants to hear."

Letty's large, brilliant grey eyes were on Walsh's back. "I'm not taken in," she was thinking. "This is only a parlour trick of his. I know the sort of man he is. As experienced as the devil, and as clever. He amuses me. I like him. Mary had better look elsewhere for a husband. He's probably involved with a married woman. Any normal man over thirty who hasn't married is involved with a married woman." She reviewed her life for now she was seeing it from a fresh angle. She'd been a good wife, no one could say she hadn't been a good and loyal wife. She'd thought of nothing, nothing, but Nelson's well-being, success and happiness. Of course she had married too young; all the emotional experience she was ever legitimately to have, must come to her through Nelson, who was a conscientious, fond husband but without surprises for her. She had never given Nelson a moment's cause for jealousy; she hoped never to do so. Indeed she feared it, with ice at her heart and a lifting of the scalp. His fury would be in proportion to his love. She had no quarrel with that. A husband who wouldn't be violently, frighteningly jealous was no husband for her. But a mild and safe flirtation with this amusing man would be good for her, good for her appearance. It was time she looked about her a little. Nothing serious, just the gayest and most innocent of affairs, something to give a little zest to life. After all, she'd seen almost no one but Nelson's business friends for years and years. She'd been entirely devoted to his interests. Before she knew where she was, he'd be finding her dull.

Poor Mary, her thoughts ran on: *a jeune fille*, still, at

nearly twenty-four. She had had Lucille at nineteen and Ivor at twenty-one. No one should be a *jeune fille* for more than a year or two. After that it became a subject for ribald jokes. Poor Mary.

This was a man, she thought, without sentiment, or at least without sentimentality. He would take the view she took of romantic love. She had no use for the unsophisticated male; he was invariably a bore. A bore, and then a nuisance. She had always taken pains to discourage, to nip and freeze, any small buds of sentimentality put out by Nelson. They offended her. Her attitude was: "I happen to suit you; you happen to suit me. We make a good thing of our joint lives. If I were to die to-morrow I hope you'd marry again within a year. As I would, if you were to die. Yes, darling, of course you love me, I know that, and I love you. It's to our mutual advantage to make our marriage a success. But don't expect me to be mawkish about it. It just isn't in me to be mawkish."

It was her ambition to be always cool, polished, charming, sure of herself, competent. She hated sloppiness; she hated inefficiency or muddle. Mary, she was quite certain, was going to make a tiresome mess of her life; she foresaw it, plainly; she was the sort of girl who inevitably would. Her mother had been like that. She was in some sort of emotional tangle when Nelson first met her; in love with a man who didn't love her or couldn't marry her. She'd been a poor sort of wife to Nelson; vague, rather religious, a hopelessly bad manager at a time when a good manager in the house was essential. Her death at thirty-two had been, poor thing, providential where Nelson was concerned. She was a terrible handicap to him and probably

knew that she was. And Mary was like her, she was her mother over again, totally unlike Nelson. Well, she'd striven with Mary since she was six years old, trying to put some sense into her head. Now she washed her hands of her. Let her look after herself. Let her go her own way. Let her even fall in love with this young barrister and take any knocks—and there'd be knocks in plenty—that might come her way as a result. "It's nothing to do with me. She's never taken my advice; I've never been able to influence her in the smallest degree. I certainly shan't try now. Let her go ahead and make a perfect fool of herself over him if she wants to. It's no concern of mine."

And Mary, painfully trying to reverse the whole current of her thoughts, painfully seeking her way out to life once more, but a life she had never even visualised for herself till now, found in Ferdinand Walsh all the incentive and encouragement she needed. Yes, this was the sort of man who could make her forget what she had lost; so clever was he, so talented; so knowledgeable. And so wonderful to look at, so completely satisfying to the eye. In him one might find—"Oh, am I a fool to think so?"—both tenderness and strength. She missed what Letty saw; saw what Letty missed. Both magnified what they saw. Letty with her erect, bird's head, bird's round, fierce, bright, empty eye, her straight back and provocatively swinging hips, her quick bird mind and certainty of aim, now set herself out to please, under Nelson's approving eye, this chance dinner guest, this amusing man, as she mentally called him, so obviously clever and on the way up. And saw, with amused pity, with inward laughter, how softly Mary spoke, how attentively she listened to

his playing, how she emerged from the background where she habitually kept herself and let loose a little the creature she was and might be, let it out on a little chain, with growing confidence, seeing that it was met with kindness.

"Well, let her make her own mistakes," thought Letty. "It's no concern of mine. She's a grown woman now. She's not my responsibility, not any longer."

Drinks were brought in, and they talked. Then Walsh sprang up and went to the piano again, with a laughing apology. To Mary he said, over his shoulder, "Do you know this?" and played some of the first act of Humperdinck's "Königskinder." "I'm rather fond of it," he said, as he played. "It expresses that side of the German nature that's blinded so many people to the other side. Stop me when you're bored with it." No one stopped him, though Letty had long ago had enough.

"Wait till I tell you what I think of your parlour tricks," Letty thought. "You're not fooling me. It's all sham."

He went home shortly before midnight, uncontrite at the length of his stay.

"I've had a lovely evening," he said, dark eyes and brows turning from Mary to Letty, and back, "please ask me again."

"Well," said Nelson when he had gone, "he seemed to enjoy himself. What do you think of my young barrister?"

"Darling," said Letty, "I wish you'd asked him here before. He's the perfect answer to the hostesses' prayer. He'll be invaluable for dinner parties. Why haven't you asked him before?"

"I haven't known him very long," Nelson said, "nor very well. He handled that patent case brilliantly and they seem to think very highly of him at the Bar. I've only met him half a dozen times. What did you think of his playing, Mary?"

"If he'd taken it seriously," Mary said, "if he'd taken the time and trouble to work hard at it, I think he might have been a very good pianist. He's thoroughly musical and his ear is surprisingly accurate."

"Well, I thought him an amusing man," said Letty with a yawn. "And I shall ask him to a party very soon. Now I'm going to bed."

And Mary, lest there should be any misunderstanding, not knowing how plainly she had let it be seen, said:

"I liked him very much, father. Very much."

He patted her shoulder, a little awkwardly. They scarcely knew each other, their lives were altogether separate. "I'm glad," he said. "You're looking better, my dear. See if you can't put on a little more fat."

She smiled at him and said good-night.

In Letty's bedroom—it was not his bedroom because he snored and had been dismissed to the dressing-room—he said, undoing his tie:

"Well, I'm very much encouraged, I must say. Do you think he took to Mary? They certainly have something in common."

"Darling," said Letty, sitting very erect at her dressing-table, "don't indulge in any romantic flights about that man and Mary. He's too clever to be caught by an inexperienced young girl. He'll marry when it suits him, and he'll marry well, a rich woman, or a woman of title, or possibly both, combined. He's got

an eye to the future ; he's got a career to think about ; one of these days you may see him on the Woolsack. He's about as likely to fall in love with a shy, delicate, rather neurotic girl as I am to fall in love with Shaw. So put that out of your mind."

He looked at her reflection in the mirror rather gloomily.

"I don't know why you're so positive about it. He put himself out to be agreeable to her."

"Oh, of course. He has good manners, and he's sorry for her. When she put out that poor little paw of hers, to show him, I know just what he felt. But fall in love with her he certainly will not. Or with anybody, if you want my opinion."

"You may be right," he said. Then he added, "But what sort of man do you think would fall in love with her?"

Letty began brushing her soft, light brown hair.

"Ask me an easier one, darling," she said. "You ought to know. She's your daughter."

"I really don't think I know anything about her," he said. "She might be a lodger here, living her own life. I suppose I ought to have taken more trouble to know her when she was a child. I blame myself a good deal."

"Yes, darling, I know," said Letty, "you've said so before, but that's because you're a very nice man, always ready to blame yourself for what you couldn't help. If you insist on blaming yourself you'll have to go further back ; you oughtn't to have given her the mother you did."

"Well," he said. "I don't know. I was pretty young, I suppose, and inexperienced."

Encouraged by her kindness he came close to her and bending down, turned her face up and kissed her. She paused, brush in hand, then put her free arm about his neck and returned his kiss.

"I hope," she said lightly, "that nobody ever says the same thing about Ivor and Lucille."

"Don't," he said, sharply, shocked. "Don't ever say that, even in fun."

"Darling," she said, "you're a very nice man."

The evening, the meeting with Ferdinand Walsh had pleased and stimulated her. She thought once again what a good wife she was, how she had never deceived Nelson and never denied him anything; no, nor ever would. Not many wives could say as much. He owed her a little relaxation, a little freedom. She didn't want anything she couldn't put aside without regret when she was ready to do so. No, she would never deprive Nelson of anything that was rightly his, nor hurt him in any way. He loved her so much. The big, barrel-shaped man with the broad warm hands smelling of cigars seemed to offer her the utmost security. She looked up at his reflection in the mirror and leaned her head for an instant against his waistcoat, smiling at him, before she resumed her hair-brushing.

"I'm really ridiculously fond of you, you know," she said.

Mary, turning now from the florist's window, remembered how she had gone up to her room that night, pulled aside the curtains and stood looking out at the lighted windows shining dimly into the thin fog that half veiled them and hid the outlines of buildings.

Born and brought up in London, she had never felt until that evening that she had any share in its vast, indifferent complexity. That night she thought that it received her, that it said to her that she too might yet draw life and happiness from it. Not the life, not the happiness she had longed for and worked for, but another, commoner kind. She felt the imminence of love; then, through that door, of marriage, of maternity, and had longed for them with a hunger she had never known before. Oh, if life would give her these, she would put what she had lost for ever out of mind. She opened her hand, with its awkward fingers, and asked herself: "Was it for this? Was there a purpose in it after all?" Then she could forgive the evil done to her, and cast off bitterness like a worn-out dress.

It was useless to warn herself, to say: "When did things ever go right with you?" Her hope had now become as stubborn as her despair, and would listen to no such cautioning. The problem of saving herself had before seemed divided into three parts; she must know what she wanted, she must find what she wanted, she must obtain what she wanted. The two first difficult stages on that road had already been passed. Not long ago, they had seemed beyond her reach. Now they were behind her and only the third remained.

She ought to have known, she thought; she ought to have been warned, if not by the lessons of the past, then by some change in Letty, for change there must have been, even if only to an eye and ear morbidly alert to variations from that quarter. The hater sees more than the lover. How, then, could she have been so blind?

But her blindness had surely not been unnatural,

her confidence, her optimism not altogether groundless. Only three days went by before a little note came from him, written from his chambers in the neatest and most pleasing of handwritings, to ask her to a concert at Queen's Hall the following week, dining first in a restaurant off St. James's Street. She had pledged herself to stay away from concerts for at least a year, by which time she hoped she might have schooled herself to bear whatever pain they could inflict on her, but to go with Ferdinand Walsh was another matter, and she readily absolved herself from her vow. It was the happiest of evenings, unforgotten and unforgettable. Rain, she remembered, had made the streets shine like canals, but it stopped as they left the restaurant. Later he had had to park his car far down Portland Place, and he was distressed that she was obliged to walk a hundred yards or so in her thin slippers on the wet pavements. She thought nothing of it, feared nothing, was utterly content. She was not shy with him, she let out the chain a little more, a little more. One day, she thought, there would be no chain at all.

When he left her at her front door he said, holding her hand in both of his, that they must meet again very soon, and when a fortnight passed she told herself that a fortnight in the life of such a busy man must seem the briefest of intervals. When they heard from him again it was to ask the three of them to dine with him at the Savoy. Letty went to the trouble of getting herself a new dress for the occasion, a black lace dress that a Spanish dancer might have worn, fitting her closely but flaring out into graceful fullness about her feet. Mary had not thought of buying a new dress ;

she wore the one she had worn the first evening he came to the house, and Letty made a face when she saw it.

"Haven't you something better? You've worn that for a year or more, and it never was particularly becoming."

Mary said: "Won't it do? It's too late to change now."

"She's going out to dine with the man she's in love with," Letty thought, "and she says: 'Won't it do?' She has no *metier de femme*, no coquetry whatever. Well, it's no concern of mine. She's not my daughter. I've done what I can."

They were six at dinner, the other two being a fellow member of the Bar, somewhat younger than Walsh, and a talkative, by no means good-looking but interesting Austrian, the widow of an English diplomat. She seemed to be on very friendly terms with their host, and Mary wondered about her a little unhappily, but Letty had no doubts about her at all, and thought: "He wouldn't ask her to meet us if it was someone who really mattered to him. Why should he?"

It was Letty's evening. She had intended that it should be. Walsh danced more with her than with either Mary or the Austrian, and Nelson looked at her with divided thoughts. Would she never grow any older? How pretty she was! Not a line, not a grey hair; as fresh and pliant as a girl. His heart ached as he thought of his increasing weight, which he never seemed to have time to do anything about, and his whitening hair which she had persuaded him to have dyed. (He didn't like it, it made him feel ashamed; it was a bore, but she had said: "Why

not? White hair only makes you look years older. You're a young man still. I want you to stay as you are.")

It wasn't long after this that Mary went out alone with Walsh again, this time to the theatre and to supper after. Another magical evening, to be remembered first with delight and then with anguish, to be blotted out with tears and shame. She sat close to him in the car as he drove her home, closer than she would have sat if she had not loved him. She was utterly certain now that she did love him and that he would wonderfully, miraculously, return her love. She sat so that her coat sleeve touched his, so that she could even feel the arm beneath the sleeve. She wanted no more at that moment, it was as much happiness as she could bear. She wanted their love for each other to ripen slowly, like an apple on a tree, in its due season.

On the doorstep he said: "Give me your key," and she took it out of her bag and gave it to him, her hand trembling. He did not at once put it in the door but stood close to her in the pillared windy darkness of the front steps, and putting his arms about her he drew her to him slowly and lifting her chin with his hand, kissed her on the lips. Her whole life, her whole being was in her amazed, marvelling whisper, "Oh, I love you so." He whispered back: "You're a darling. You are, you know. One day soon I'll tell you more. But not here." He opened the door, gave her back the key, smiled fondly at her in the light from the hall, and went down the steps and got into his car. She waited till she heard the car drive away and then went slowly up to her room, drunk and dazed with happiness. She could not sleep but lay in bed hugging

herself in a half unbelieving ecstasy. Here was all that she had longed for and more, more. Here, and hers.

Letty had said to Nelson that evening: "Now don't let this raise your hopes. He's sorry for her. He's simply being kind."

"How do you know it's only kindness?" he asked.

"Darling, don't ask me to say *how* I know. I simply know."

Soon after this she said to him:

"I lunched with Harriet to-day and who do you think was there? Ferdinand Walsh. It seems she met him somewhere quite recently and took to him at once. After lunch he invited me to go with him and hear him plead a case in court. It was a very dull case but I thought he spoke well."

"I'm sorry Mary wasn't there too," he said, and she replied:

"Well, it's her own fault. She never liked Harriet."

Shortly after this, Letty invited him to the house to a dinner party of sixteen people. He was not put next to Mary and they scarcely spoke to each other. He played bridge after dinner, and she had never learnt to play. It was a miserable evening for her, and she was thankful when it was over, though she cried a little in her room. Within the week he rang up to ask her out to lunch, but she had gone to Surrey to spend a few days with her aged grandmother Hallam, and Letty answered the telephone.

Nelson was irritated at the way things hung fire. Was Letty right or wrong? Did Mary and Walsh like each other or didn't they? And if they did, why didn't they get on with it? To help matters along he asked Ferdinand to join them at a play and to have supper

at a restaurant and dance afterwards. A night was agreed upon and Mary looked forward to it with so much dread and so much eagerness that when the day came she woke with a feeling of deep depression and helplessness which was not made better by the nearness of one of her violent headaches. She was always warned of their approach by a feeling of emptiness in her head, by lassitude, and a weakness that made her hands tremble. At noon Nelson rang up Letty to say that he was obliged to go to Manchester on business and so wouldn't be back until the following day. He wanted Shaw to pack a suit-case and bring it to the office.

"Don't let it spoil your evening," he said. "I don't want to disappoint Mary. Try and get someone in my place. I expect Greer would jump at it if you asked him."

"All right, darling," said Letty, "but I'm terribly sorry. It's quite ruined the evening for me."

She didn't want to ask Greet Hopkinson if she could get anyone else. She'd been bored by him all too often. But after trying one or two other possibilities with no success, she rang him up. As she had expected, he said he'd like nothing better than to come.

When it was time to dress, Mary's headache was in full possession. Her eyeballs ached, the base of her skull seemed to be gripped in a vice, the pulses in her temples beat like cruel little hammers. She knew that she looked her worst, her eyes sunken, her skin sallow. Even her hair, her thick, dark, flattering hair, seemed to have lost both life and lustre. She used her simple arts; brilliantine, a little dry rouge, a brighter lipstick. The wan face defeated them. "I'll see it

through," she thought. She had had a present from Ferdinand that morning—a book that he had promised to send her. He had written in it: "For Mary, from F.L.W." Coming on a day when she needed comfort and assurance, it had brought her infinite balm. It was Henry James's "The Tragic Muse," which he had had bound for her very prettily. She remembered afterwards, remembered as though she had been watching another person through a window, how she had touched its smooth, polished binding with her lips before putting it into her desk and turning a key on it.

Greer Hopkinson called for them in his far too handsome car. He was a successful stockbroker, fifty-six, bald and facetious. He made puns, he had a foolish laugh, he pretended that he and Mary had an understanding, were "sweethearts." He liked to talk as though they were to be married some day. "When we're married, sweetheart," he would say, "we'll go to Capree on our honeymoon." He sent both Mary and Letty expensive boxes of flowers on their birthdays and at Christmas, and great boxes of chocolates tied with satin bows. He was Nelson's friend and his broker. They had been schoolmates, and had come from the same street in the same decorous suburb. Greer had a chauffeur whom he made the butt of many of his jokes, in all good nature but with tedious and embarrassing frequency.

"Before he came to me," Greer was fond of saying, "Sibley was employed by a firm of undertakers as a mute. Best possible training for a chauffeur."

He had little conversation, but filled in any pauses there might be by a tuneless singing. He liked to squeeze Mary's hand, and to tuck it under his arm.

"Ever hear of a place called Bali?" he asked her, as they drove to the theatre. "That's where we're going on our honeymoon."

She leaned her aching head against the well-stuffed back of the seat.

"That will be wonderful," she said.

"You've only got to name the day, sweetheart."

"Leave Mary alone," said Letty, tartly. "She has a headache. Don't be a nuisance."

"Got a headache, angel?" He patted Mary's hand. "I've got some aspirins in my pocket. Take a couple between the acts."

"I'm full of aspirin," Mary said.

"Poor little girl. You want someone to take care of you. Well, I'm your man. I've said it before and I say it again. Name the day, and we'll hire a yacht and go round the world."

"You'd drive any woman raving mad," said Letty. "It's a lucky thing you never married."

"I'm the kindest chap that ever drew breath. Children, dogs and women all worship me."

"Well, for heaven's sake," said Letty, "don't get married. You'd be inviting murder. I'm quite fond of you, Greer, and I understand why Nelson's fond of you, but take my advice and stay a bachelor."

"I'm going to," he said, "unless Mary'll have me."

"I'm going into a nunnery," Mary said. "Otherwise I might consider it."

They approached the theatre and Greer slid back the window behind the chauffeur.

"Sibley, it's your business to find me, remember, not mine to find you. We'll be at the front entrance,

and if you aren't there when the crowd comes out, you'll get the sack. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Sibley.

"With your head in it," added Greer. He turned to Letty as they got out. "Where's the boy friend?"

"Waiting for us in the lobby, I imagine, unless he's late. His name is Walsh. Ferdinand Walsh."

"Golly!" he said, taking Mary's elbow. "So I'm about to meet my hated rival!"

Letty saw to it that Mary sat between the two men, while she herself sat on Ferdinand's right. Greer therefore had only Mary to talk to before the curtain went up, and he never stopped talking. Once, during the play, Letty leaned across Ferdinand and whispered to Mary, "How are you feeling?"

"All right," said Mary, shortly, and added "thank you." She hated the way Letty leaned across Ferdinand to speak to her.

"It's not much of a play," whispered Letty. "If you wanted to go home you wouldn't be missing much."

Mary only shook her head. Ferdinand whispered to her, bending his head down close to her ear: "You don't want to go, do you?"

"No," she answered.

The play was light, foolish, empty, and Ferdinand tore it to pieces without mercy as they made their way out. "I never can see," he said, "why, because someone asks you to a play, you're debarred by politeness from criticising it. It's like placing a nice dish of bones in front of a muzzled dog. What did you think of it, Mrs. Hallam?"

"What people usually think of a bad play," she

answered. "That they could have written a better one."

"I thought it was first rate," protested Greer Williamson. "I don't know what's wrong with you people. Carp, carp, carp. That little actress—what was her name?—the red-haired one, was the goods. And that funny chap made me laugh like a fool. Jolly good, I thought, the whole thing. Well, come along, boys and girls. There's Sibley. In you get."

And now the evening assumed, for Mary, a really nightmare quality. As they sat at the supper table, there seemed to be no remembrance in Ferdinand Walsh's eyes, of those moments by the front door. She might, she thought, have dreamt them. Now the incident, the words she had whispered, seemed isolated in time and space, without reference to past, present or future. Again and again she searched his eyes, his cool and friendly and unmeaning eyes, and the whispered words became a monstrous, shameful indiscretion. Oh, what had she done, answering his kiss with all of herself when nothing had been intended by him but an instant's pleasure, as he might have sniffed a violet or stroked a dog's soft ear. In that whisper she had made a complete confession of love, however she might try to twist or turn the words into something else, or give them some other meaning. And now a cool eye met hers, blank for her purposes. There is a look that speaks, a look that collaborates, a look that, like a stone thrown into a pool, sets all the waters in motion. Again and again she searched his eyes for it, while Letty and Greer were dancing, but there was nothing there, nothing but what had been there before those words were uttered, and now it was not enough. Her miseries,

mental and physical, overwhelmed her. When she got up to dance with him her feet were leaden and the room and the lights and the other dancers swam about her. As they danced, Ferdinand said to her:

"You're not looking at all well. We're all worried about you. Don't you think you ought to go home?"

So "we" were worried. She had not known that two letters could inflict such pain.

She was close to desperate tears.

"Perhaps I'd better go," she said.

"Poor child. We'll stop dancing. Shall we have an evening out together soon? Would you like it? I'll ring you up."

She nodded, unable to speak. As they returned to the supper table he said to Letty, in his kindest voice:

"This child's all in. Don't you think she ought to go home and go to bed?"

"Well, I don't think there's any doubt of it," Letty said. "Don't you think so yourself, Mary? We hate to lose you, it's a shame, but there it is. You look almost ill. Greer, run her home in your car, like a dear, will you? And then come back."

Mary looked wildly at Ferdinand. Could it be possible that he would let this happen? Greer was already on his feet. "Come along, sweetheart," he said. "Daddy'll take you home."

Ferdinand flashed a sympathetic look at her and held out his hand.

"Take care of yourself. You mustn't be ill."

As she still lingered, uncertain, Letty said:

"I told Eva to sit up, so ring for her when you get in."

Have a hot drink before you go to bed. And tell her she needn't wait up for me. Not that I shall be late, but I don't like keeping her up after twelve."

Ill though she felt, Mary wanted to stay, longed to stay, but Greer stood waiting, a hand held out to her, and she knew that if she said she would stay they would continue to urge her to go. She turned without another word and left the supper room.

In the car, Greer took her hand and tucked it under his arm.

"Poor little girl, why don't Letty take you to Egypt or the Riviera or somewhere? You ought to be in the sun."

She tried to laugh but burst into tears instead and sat sobbing amidst the wreckage of the evening, the wreckage of her hopes. If he'd cared for her, he would have taken her home, instead of letting her go home with Greer. Greer should have stayed with Letty, not Ferdinand, if Letty wanted to stay.

"Now, now," said Greer, putting an arm about her and patting her shoulder, "pretty girls shouldn't cry and spoil their looks. Marry me, and we'll go to the South Sea Islands. Don't you listen to Letty. I'd make the best husband in the world. Now don't cry, ducks. Here, take a real hankie. Don't cry."

She tried to control herself, and managed to say:

"Be careful, Greer. I might take you at your word one of these days."

He laughed. "Things as bad as all that? Poor old Greer! Nobody loves him. Now, that's better. I'll tell you something, sweetheart. I'm not going back to the others. I'm going straight home to bed when I leave you. I've got a busy day to-morrow. Letty

won't mind. It's been a grand evening and all that, but sleep's sleep and slumber's slumber."

She wiped her eyes. This was unexpected and unwelcome.

"But they'll wait for you," she protested. "Letty expects you to go back."

"Catch Letty waiting for anybody," he said. "Not she. She'll stay just as long as it suits her to stay and then go home. I know Letty."

"Yes, but——" she began, but he broke in.

"Don't you worry. It'll be O.K. And I'll get a good night's sleep. We boys on the Stock Exchange need all our wits about us these days, believe you me as they say in Ireland. Here we are, sweetheart. Give daddy a nice kiss and see that you're fit and well to-morrow."

The absurd, good-natured man whom she had known ever since she could remember, took her key and let her in. "There you are. Sweet dreams. Bye-bye darling."

He got into the front seat beside the chauffeur.

"Sibley," he said, lighting a cigar, "did it ever occur to you that if you and I had one per cent. of what London's spending to-night boring itself at plays and restaurants, we'd be rich men?"

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir," said Sibley, turning towards the Marble Arch.

"Rich men. And nobody any the worse. Makes you think, don't it?"

"It does indeed, sir."

"Well, well, well. Three holes in the ground. Got to do something, I suppose, to pass the time. How's the wife, Sibley?"

"Quite well, sir, thank you."

"Good. You human, Sibley?"

"I hope so, sir."

"I doubt it, you know, I doubt it. Ever kick over the traces?"

"No, sir, I leave that to my betters."

"Ha! That's a good one. Well, well, well. Three holes in the ground."

Mary could picture herself wearily climbing the stairs to her room. (Letty was having a lift put into the house in the spring). She did not ring for Eva, but Eva heard her and came down from her room on the topmost floor. She looked at her, and looked again.

"Aren't you well, miss?" the kind girl asked, with real concern.

"No, Eva, I feel awful. I had to come home. But I don't want anything, I'm going straight to bed. And Mrs. Hallam asked me to say that she didn't want you to wait up for her."

"I've got a spirit lamp in the housemaid's pantry," Eva said. "It wouldn't take me above a minute to make you a nice hot cup of malted milk."

"No thanks, Eva. I couldn't drink it. I don't want anything."

She wondered if she dare take any more aspirins. How many were dangerous? She didn't know. She didn't much care. She lay awake, listening for Letty to come in. She had left her door open a bare inch so as to be sure to hear her. After that, she thought, she might fall asleep. It was now twelve-thirty, and she supposed they might stay and dance for another hour. Tears flooded her eyes again and fell on her

pillow. Then she remembered the book that had come that morning, and got up and took it out of the desk. She lay reading it, comforting herself with the feel of it between her hands; something that he had touched, liked, given her. "For Mary." Written in his own hand, for anyone to see. And he called Letty "Mrs. Hallam." At one moment it gave her hope; at another it seemed to put her in her place, as a young girl he liked and was sorry for. Was that how he thought of her? Oh, was there no way to recall the flown word, the word expended?

By half-past one Letty had not come home, and by the throbbing of her temples, the restlessness in her arms and legs and a thirst that water did not quench, she knew her temperature had risen. She took a thermometer out of a drawer in her bedside table and put it into her mouth, childishly hoping that her temperature was well above normal. A hundred and two. Well, she was one of those people who ran a temperature fairly easily. If only, if only Letty would come home, she might sleep a little. What were they doing? Had they gone on to a nightclub? Were they talking about her? What would Letty say? She believed she knew only too well what Letty would say.

She thought she heard a sound and after listening with held breath, got out of bed and ran down to Letty's room in her dressing-gown and slippers only to find it empty, abominably, guiltily empty, the bed turned down and a silk and lace nightdress laid across it. How it all spoke of Letty! The old rose hangings, the gilt, the white fur rugs, the pink roses on the dressing-table, the wood fire, mostly embers now, with the underclothes she would put on in the morning laid neatly

on a chair beside it. How she hated, how she hated Letty! Yet, deeply as she hated her, she had never hated her presence as much as she now hated her absence. "Oh, Letty, I could almost love you if you were here!" she thought.

Back to bed, shivering now, her head hot, her headache knocking wildly about inside her skull, like a trunk adrift and awash in a ship's cabin. Another endless hour passed, dragging itself lamely by. They must have gone on to a nightclub. But Letty never went to nightclubs. No, because Nelson hated them. Now she was free to do as she pleased. Free to do anything.

And as she lay there, hating Letty with a passion that exhausted her, she understood something she had not understood before. All the good things in life (or the things Letty thought good) came to her through Nelson, and it was Nelson who prevented her full and free enjoyment of them. The story, Mary guessed, of many a woman, and oh, how clearly, to-night, the story of Letty!

A clock downstairs struck three, and Mary gave a little moan, an audible moan, as though there had been someone there to hear. She sat up and beat her fists upon her knees. "Come home, Letty! Letty, come home. You know what you're doing to me, you do, you do!" She did not think of her father now, no thought of him crossed her tormented mind. There was no sound in the house, even the rumble of London had ceased, as if it had been put away for the night. She lay, fevered in body and mind while yet another hour passed. She heard four strike, then five. Oh, where were they, what were they doing? The bed shook with her trembling. She was beyond hate now.

Her heart, she thought, had broken, had ceased to be a heart. She lay crying helplessly into her pillow, crying and shivering and stopping sometimes to listen, tense, rigid, to catch a sound from below. He has a flat, she thought; he has a bachelor flat. She had once passed the door of the building where he lived, going out of her way to pass it, to look at it, because it was his. Could a man take a woman like Letty into his bachelor flat? What was to prevent it? Of course he could. Would Letty go? Yes, if she felt safe, if she felt sure. Then that was where they were. She knew it now, knew it with absolute certainty. Then everything was ended. Worse than ended. Poisoned and made loathsome, for ever. She began crying again, helplessly. "Oh God, let me die! I want to die!"

At half-past five she heard a taxi draw up, not in front of the house, but a little way down the square. Once more she held her breath, straining to hear. After a little interval she heard steps on the stair, soft, infinitely cautious steps, and once or twice the treads creaked a little. Then Letty's bedroom door opened, giving a faint swish as it was pushed over the thick pile carpet and repeating the sound as it closed, with a final click. Now she was in her room; now she was home again; now it was over. The girl stood shivering at the inch-wide opening of the door, and in her mind's eye followed Letty across her room to the dressing-table between the steep fall of the old rose curtains on either side; saw her sit looking at herself in the glass, her face still stamped with triumph, pleasure and fatigue. She could see that look on Letty's face as plainly as if she were in the room with her. Though she had never seen it on any woman's face, she knew it would be there.

She closed her own door noiselessly and let her breath out in a great sigh, as if it were all the breath she had and all she would ever have; as though it were all she would ever need. "Letty!" Very slowly she went to her bed and crept in. She felt as though she had walked through some searing flame and was now reduced to the size of a walnut. She drew up her knees, drew her whole body into a small, trembling knot. She was beyond tears. Those she had shed earlier were the tears of a child. If she had known the trick of dying, she would have died then.

Towards seven in the morning, consciousness was blotted out by a short, picture-haunted sleep, but when Eva came in to draw the curtains at half-past eight, she was lying with her eyes wide open, but staring and sunken. When Eva spoke to her she made no reply, and her breathing was quick and shallow. Frightened, the girl ran down to tell Letty, and by noon the doctor had been there and arrangements had been made to take her to a nursing home.

"If she escapes pneumonia," the doctor said, "we shall be very lucky."

"Well, I told her," Letty said, "that she wasn't well enough to go out last night, but she was determined to go. I did my best to persuade her not to."

She was looking very attractive in a brown dress with white collar and cuffs. The doctor thought he had never seen anyone who looked less in need of his attentions. He had always admired her.

"Has our patient had a shock of any sort?" he asked. "She seems so . . . well, one might almost say numbed."

"Not that I know of," said Letty, her heart giving a

little leap, like that of a fish in a net. "If she has, she's said nothing to me."

She was three weeks in the nursing home. Twice Ferdinand Walsh sent her flowers. Later she received a note from him to say that he was going abroad for the Easter recess, probably to Ragusa with some friends. She did not hear from him again. Not a word. Never a word. Knowing what she knew, she thought the more of him for it. Did Letty continue to see him? There was no possible way of knowing. Some time after her return from the nursing home, when she was still convalescent, her father asked Letty in her hearing :

"Why haven't we seen Walsh lately? Aren't you going to ask him to dinner soon?"

Mary's heart shook her body with its beating; she listened with her whole being for Letty's answer.

Letty gave a light, good-humoured laugh.

"Oh, darling, we're much too dull for Ferdinand Walsh. We're not sufficiently fashionable. I think he was bored with the people he met here. We don't know enough celebrities."

"That's nonsense," said Nelson. "If the people who come here are good enough for us they're good enough for him."

"Darling," she said, in her gayest tones, "I assure you, his friends are very grand. He dines with duchesses and Cabinet Ministers."

She threw Nelson a warning look which stopped further discussion. When they were in her room that evening she said to him :

"Darling, you were very tactless. Ferdinand Walsh doesn't come here any more because of Mary. He's an honourable man, I suppose, and she let him see,

rather too plainly. . . . Well, I don't have to dot all the i's and cross all the t's, do I? I'm extremely sorry about it, he was so useful at dinner parties, and I liked him, but you remember I told you it would all come to nothing."

"He's always very friendly when I see him anywhere," Nelson said.

"But why not? Of course he is. I do wish someone could teach Mary how to make herself more attractive to men."

"Poor child," he said. "She seems to have lost interest in everything since this illness. I wish she'd go on a cruise."

"She doesn't seem to want to do anything," Letty said.

Mary knew now that her hatred of Letty had become an obsession. It shut out every other emotion. It even at times gave her a dangerous and morbid pleasure. As she reached the hotel, she was thinking once more, "Suppose I were to tell Maud Cotter the whole story. What would she think? What would she say?"

She knew that she couldn't possibly tell Maud, that she couldn't tell anyone. She saw too plainly now what at first she had ignored or had been unable to look at, how her father was involved, how the relationship between the three of them had been altered. No, she could never speak of it to anyone; never.

As she went to the reception desk she felt a strong impulse to turn and go away without asking for Maud. "I could telephone, I could say I'm not well enough." She was hesitating, more than half inclined to run away when Maud came into the lobby from the lift and saw

her. She kissed her and said in her robust and genial way :

"My dear, I'm very glad to see you. You're looking better than you looked the other evening. Lowell's just coming down. He's always late. Meanwhile, we'll have a sherry."

She talked with easy naturalness, she might have been seeing Mary daily, and the girl sat listening, wondering what sort of picture this friend of Letty's had of her, trying to see herself through Maud's eyes.

"It's good to sit down. I've been walking about the galleries since ten o'clock. I never notice how tired I am till I'm on my way home. But it takes a lot to tire me, really; I'm as strong as a horse."

She looked at Mary and asked, "Who do you look like? You're not like your father at all. Do you look like your mother?"

"I've never been told whether I look like my mother or not," Mary said. "I've seen some photographs, though, and I suppose there is a resemblance."

"You made a sweet little bridesmaid at Letty's wedding," Maud said. "I remember you perfectly. Can you remember at all what you felt that day?"

Mary said she remembered feeling frightened and she remembered the wedding cake, which was the first she'd ever seen. Then Maud waved in the direction of the lift and said, "Here's Lowell. You remember him, don't you?"

The delicate man came towards them, walking deliberately and not smiling, but with an air of pre-occupation as if he were thinking of other, more important matters. Mary thought he looked fragile, as if ill-health had aged him before his time, but his

face and expression were not old; they were young, almost immature.

He took her awkward hand, and said: "You've grown up since I saw you last. Why can't children remain children, instead of trespassing on our land? Here you are, almost one of us now."

He said it grumblingly, with a quick, sidelong glance at her, and then sat down. "Did you order sherry, Maudie?"

"It's just coming," she told him. "Don't begin fidgeting, just because you're late. I bought two pictures this morning. I can't tell you how agreeable it is," she said turning to Mary, "to spend other people's money."

"I wouldn't say you positively hated spending your own," said Lowell, brushing some imaginary dust from his trousers. A waiter brought sherry, and Maud said:

"Ah, but spending other people's is better. I feel like a City Boss or a Russian Grand Duke. Well, here's your good health, Mary, and may you have lots of it."

"I could do with some," Mary said. She wondered if she would ever be as settled in the world, as definite in character as these two. It would be a long time to wait, and what would she do in the meantime? And suddenly she was re-living the dream of the night before, the dream of lost, departed, unenjoyed spring. She gave a little shiver and drank her sherry.

Later, at lunch, Maud and Lowell argued for some time about the merits of a play they had seen the evening before; there was a tartness in some of their remarks that made Mary laugh.

"We know each other too well," Maud said. "Politeness has long ago gone by the board. We say what we think."

"That must be very pleasant," Mary said.

Lowell turned to her and asked :

"Do you say what you think, or what you imagine people would like you to say?"

She considered for a moment, wishing to answer truthfully. It was a question she had never asked herself.

"Neither," she replied. "I say what I feel certain won't commit me to anything or give me away."

"Well, when you get to our age," he said, "you'll want to give yourself away, if there's anything to give. You'll want people to know, while there's still time, what you're really like. Now you imagine you've got all the time there is."

"I've got too much time," she said, with sudden recklessness, "and it's no use to me."

"Poor child," Maud thought, "she really meant it. What's brought her to this pass? Letty or the accident? Probably both."

"I thought that once," Lowell told her. "It's only a phase, don't let it get you down." He had taken a liking to the girl. He glanced at Maud and she saw something in his expression that made her wonder what he was going to say next. "While we've been sitting here," he said, "I've had a bright idea. Why don't you come over to Paris with us? Don't you think she ought to, Maudie? I need someone to keep me company while you're prowling around the art galleries."

"I'll make you pay for this," Maud thought. "Don't

think I'm amused. But you aren't going to get a rise out of me here."

"Now isn't that a queer coincidence?" she exclaimed. "I was just going to make the same suggestion. Yes, do come with us, Mary; it would be the best possible thing. Get your passport, pack a couple of suit-cases and be ready to come with us on Friday next. What do you say?"

Mary looked from one to the other with undisguised amazement.

"But do you really mean it? You know what I'm like. Letty's told you, hasn't she? I'm always getting ill. I'd only be a nuisance. Hadn't you better talk it over after I've gone?"

"Now look," said Maud, "there are doctors in Paris; good ones. It'll be spring over there. It comes earlier than it does here. We'll have a grand time. Get your passport and leave the rest to us."

"She can't face it," said Lowell. "She can't face Paris in the spring with a couple of old bores like us."

Mary looked at him as if she had not even heard. He thought her eyes had an oddly blind look, as if they saw only inwardly.

"But I don't see why you want me. I can't think why you even suggested it."

"We happen to think it would be nice to have you," Lowell said. "Why not just leave it at that?"

She blinked rapidly, as if she had suddenly come out into the sunlight.

"All right, I'll come," she said.

"Good," exclaimed Maud. "And if Letty or your father raise any objections, let me deal with them."

"They'll warn you," Mary said. "They'll warn you about me."

"She's got me on her hands," said Lowell. "She might as well have you too."

But as they left the dining-room, Mary's honesty got the better of her. Maud was Letty's friend, and she hated Letty. She asked Maud if she might speak to her alone. Lowell, whose ears were sharp, overheard and said he had a letter to write, and that they'd find him in the writing-room in half an hour.

Going up in the lift Mary tried to put into words what she should say. But when they were in Maud's bedroom she went to the window and stood opening and shutting the catch of her bag till Maud came to her and putting a hand on her shoulder, said :

"Listen, child, you can say anything to me. It's about Letty, I suppose. Do you two get on so very badly? Frankly, I don't think I'd like Letty for a stepmother myself."

Mary turned to her, her face suddenly distorted, her brows drawn together as though a string had been tightly pulled.

"I hate her! I hate her! How can I accept anything from you? You're her friend."

"Well, well, what of that?" Maud asked calmly. "You've accepted lunch and it didn't choke you." She smiled. "All right. You hate Letty. It makes no difference to me. I've always known her, my mother's devoted to her, but don't imagine I can't see her faults. There are times when I wonder why I go on seeing her, she irritates me so. I'm asking you to come to Paris with us because you're Mary Hallam, not because you're Letty's stepdaughter."

"But when I say I hate her," the girl insisted fiercely, "I mean it."

"I can see you do. You needn't even tell me your reasons. I can guess most of them, I think. Tell me, how does she get on with her own children, with Ivor and Lucille?"

Mary's face smoothed out a little. She began to talk quickly and nervously, as if she longed for the relief that talking might give her.

"Ivor's devoted to her. Though he's rather frightened of her. Lucille's fondest of father. She's critical of Letty, but a little frightened of her too. Really," she hurried on, "neither of them know anything about children. They don't understand them at all. They drill them, as if they were soldiers on the parade ground. They tried to drill me when I was little, but I was too delicate. They only think of discipline. Ivor's terribly nervous when he's with them; so nervous he stammers. Lucille used to be, but now that she's got older she stands up to them more."

"I remember," interrupted Maud, "how they used to be brought down to the drawing-room by the nurse, beautifully dressed, and collected again about twenty minutes later."

"Yes, they used to be allowed to come into the library or the drawing-room after tea," Mary said; "but if other people were there they couldn't speak except to answer questions. Sometimes father would organise some sort of game, but it usually ended by his losing his temper. If they misbehaved in any way they were questioned as if they were prisoners in the dock. They've never had a chance to be happy; not really happy as children should be. They're never

natural with father and Letty; they're not allowed to be. It's better for them now that they're away at school so much. But then there are the holidays. In the summer father and Letty usually take a house in the country somewhere—at least they call it the country—a big house near good golf links. You know the sort of house I mean, with a portico and a gravelled drive and shrubberies."

She stopped suddenly, and said, "I oughtn't to be talking like this."

"Go on," said Maud. "Tell me whatever you feel like telling me. Go on."

"These houses always had well-kept gardens," Mary went on, "like gardens in parks, with plants all bedded out. You expect to see signs telling you to keep off the grass. There would always be a tennis court or two, but the children weren't allowed to play on them by themselves or run about with tennis rackets and a ball; they had to take lessons from a professional. They had to have swimming lessons, golf lessons, from professionals. Ivor isn't very good at cricket, and father makes him take lessons from a coach during the holidays—and he hates it. They've never had a summer in the real country until they went to Norway last year; nor have I. We've never lived on a farm. We've only had those dreary summers in big, overfurnished houses with a lot of week-end visitors always coming and going; people we had to be polite to. Aunt Maud, what's wrong with people like father and Letty? What's wrong with them?"

To this cry Maud had no immediate answer.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know. I suppose they've set themselves a standard of sorts. They're

trying to be like the kind of people they admire, and they want their children to be like them."

"Perhaps," said Mary. "I don't know either. I don't understand them. I'll be sorry I've said all this, but I must say it. Now Lucille's beginning to rebel. She's got a will of her own; she's got talent and she knows it and means to develop it. She's strong. Perhaps she'll be all right. I don't know about Ivor. He's nervous and highly strung. They think he's getting on so well at Eton. Well, he isn't. He hates it and he's terrified father will find it out. He's been disciplined and drilled so much that he's turning away from all the things they've tried to make him good at. He even hates games now, and killing things makes him sick. He has a good eye and father wants him to be a good shot, and he loathes shooting. Do you know what Ivor wants to be, Aunt Maud? He wants to be a stage designer. It's all he cares about."

Maud tried to reconcile this news with the photograph she had seen.

"Well, this does surprise me. He seemed to be landing a salmon very successfully in the snapshot that I saw on your father's writing table."

"It was all posed," the girl insisted. "Father caught the salmon. He thought it would encourage Ivor if he were photographed killing a big fish." She seemed to tremble with indignation, as if she spoke of some outrage upon Ivor, whom she loved.

"Were you there too?"

"No, Lucille told me. I was in London having treatments for my hand."

"Well," said Maud, "I've seen something of the drilling and the disciplining, but I didn't know what

the results of it all were. Of course I haven't seen much of the children. But that isn't why you hate Letty, is it? There's something more, isn't there?"

She saw the girl's expression alter. She lowered her eyes and drew her lips together before answering:

"Yes, there's more. Much more. But don't ask me to tell you, Aunt Maud. I can't possibly tell you."

"Of course I won't ask you," said Maud. "Don't think of it again. And my dear, don't call me Aunt Maud. Call me Maud. And call Lowell Lowell. He'd like it."

"Thank you," said Mary. "But now that I've told you I hate Letty, do you still want me to come?"

Maud put a hand on her shoulder and turned her towards the door.

"It just doesn't make an atom of difference. I'm sorry you hate Letty because hating's such a painful business, that's all. Now let's go down and tell Lowell that it's all settled. That letter-writing of his was a sham; he never writes letters. We're going to the National Gallery this afternoon. Why don't you come with us?"

Mary said the doctor had ordered her to rest for an hour after lunch, and after saying good-bye and promising to be ready on Friday next, she went back to Hyde Park Square. She tiptoed past the door of the library where Letty was having a German lesson from a good-looking young German refugee, and went up to her room. As she climbed the stairs she knew, as though she had been allowed to look through a small window into a portion of her future, that she was not coming back. That she was never coming back. She didn't know what was going to happen

to her or what the alternative might be. She was simply not coming back.

Driving to the National Gallery in a taxi, Maud said to Lowell :

" You double-crosser, you schemer, how dared you ? "

" It was the only thing to do," he answered calmly. " If you'd suggested it, she'd have been convinced that the whole idea was Letty's. How little you understand human nature."

" Of all the dirty tricks you ever played on me, that one was about the dirtiest."

" If it was a trick, see how well it worked. It's nothing to me whether she comes or not, but your heart seemed to be set on it. Do you know, Maudie, it wouldn't surprise me if that girl tried to commit suicide ? "

" You mean while she's with us ? "

" No, I mean if she'd been left with Letty much longer. She might try, anyway."

" Comparatively few women commit suicide," Maud said dryly. " It's a masculine weakness, like colour blindness."

" Well," he said, " say what you like, it's written in her face. She hates herself. You'll see."

" Women never hate themselves," Maud told him. " If people don't love us we think they're blind or crazy. We go through life believing that, given a bit of luck, the enchanting, unique being that is really us will one day be valued and loved as it deserves to be."

" But don't we all ? "

" No," she said. " You men don't have to protect your egos as we do. You're tougher. You can take

it. We can't. And once a man loses faith in himself he goes all the way. A woman believes in herself to the bitter end. She must. If the whole world should say, 'This woman hasn't got a single thing that anybody wants,' she'd still know that the world was wrong. Of course," she added, "women do sometimes kill themselves, but usually it's in the hope of making some man suffer the pangs of remorse."

"Well, if you're right," he said, "that girl's an exception. She looks to me empty of hope. Not desperate, nothing as violent as that; just empty."

"In six weeks," Maud said, "she'll be a different creature."

"I don't know why. I shouldn't think a few weeks in Paris with you and me is going to look so hot to a young girl. Who's she going to meet? Do we know anybody under fifty?"

"Not much under," Maud agreed.

"Well, then?"

"Oh, don't worry. You always worry so. You're always anticipating the worst."

"Yes," he agreed. "It's a sort of insurance against its happening. I've always done it and on the whole it's worked very well."

"That's why you're so busy worrying about a war, I suppose." Then she added hurriedly: "Don't say anything. I didn't mean to mention it."

The taxi had reached their destination and had stopped. Lowell, as he opened the door, said:

"Maudie, I'm very happy. I'm just going to live in the present. If I look ahead it will be for one day only. One step enough for me."

"All right," she said. "That suits me, too."

"If we'd been married all these years," he said, as they went up the steps, "it wouldn't have been so very different, would it?"

She hesitated a bare second before replying: "Well, I suppose not so very different. But why bring that up?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just said I was happy, and then I realised how entirely my happiness depended on you. I'm happy because you're here. I'm never happy except when I'm with you. As I look back, all my past happiness has depended on you."

"Well," she said, gaily, "that's quite a testimonial. And I'll bet that if we'd been married all these years, you'd never have said it."

"I don't see why I'd have been any different," he said gently, seriously.

"Neither do I, but you would have been."

"You'd have known it just the same."

"Maybe, but you might not have said it." She smiled. "That's why I like things as they are."

He paused for a moment on the way up to get his breath, and then said, not looking at her.

"You know, Maudie, it's worried me a lot that I was the cause of your never having married. I've often thought I ought to have died."

"Don't be an old idiot," was all she found to say, but she said it lovingly.

"All right," he said, with his charming and youthful smile, "if that's how you feel about it. Now don't you run me off my legs. I'll look at ten pictures and no more."

3

NELSON and Letty were going to a charity ball in aid of a hospital that night and Mary did not see them until just before dinner. There was no dinner party because Nelson had said he would like to dine quietly for once. Letty said, "Of course, darling, I'm always glad to dine quietly."

To-night she was in white, and in her hair, which was dressed high, was a red silk rose. As Mary came into the library where they were having a before-dinner cocktail she heard her father say .

"Isn't that rose just a little . . . ?"

Letty offered Mary a cocktail, which she declined, before turning to Nelson and asking .

"A little what, darling? Young? Frivolous?"

"A little provocative?" he suggested.

"Well, mayn't I be provocative?"

He said a little irritably :

"If you want to I suppose you must."

"I'll take it out if you like, darling," Letty said, "but it means I'll have to do my hair over again. Just as you say."

"No," he said, unwillingly, "leave it if you like it."

"Well, I do like it. Thank you my sweet." She went to him and kissed him prettily. "I'm hoping it will help me through the evening."

"I've no doubt it will," he said, with mild irony.

She laughed and said to Mary :

“How did you get on with Maud and Lowell ? ”

Mary said she had enjoyed the lunch very much. Each word that she spoke to Letty was uttered under compulsion, and the tone carefully guarded, polite, level, expressionless. Having answered her question she said to her father :

“They’ve asked me to go to Paris with them, father, on Friday. Do you see any reason why I shouldn’t accept ? ”

Suppose he says no, she was thinking. What shall I do then ?

He played his part well, as did Letty.

“Have they really ? How very nice of them. How very kind ! ”

“Isn’t Maud sweet ? ” cried Letty melodiously. “She’s such a dear. Does she want you to go as her guest ? I expect she does.”

“I don’t know,” said Mary, and added, “it was Mr. Pierce who suggested it first.”

“I see no reason at all why you shouldn’t go,” said her father avoiding Letty’s eyes. “But, of course, you must pay your own expenses.” And then, as if fearing to show too much readiness, he added, “Are you sure you feel strong enough ? It would be a bore if you were taken ill over there.”

“I’ll have to risk that,” said Mary, remembering how gladly she would have risked it before, when it had mattered so much more than now.

“You’ll have to get your passport seen to to-morrow. There isn’t too much time. How long do you want to stay ? ”

“They didn’t say anything about that.”

"Well, stay as long as you like. How much money do you think you'll need? A hundred pounds?"

"It seems an awful lot," said Mary.

Letty laughed. "It wouldn't last me very long in Paris." When she spoke the word "Paris," her lips formed it lovingly, her nostrils dilated as if she smelt some entrancing smell, her eyes shone and grew wider.

Nelson looked away from her.

"I'll change a hundred pounds into francs for you. If you need more you can send for it. Of course, if it looks like war you'll come straight back."

"War?" said Mary. "Do you really think . . .?"

"It looks very much like it. Of course it may all blow over. Germany may climb down."

"You could fly home," Letty said. "You'd like to fly, wouldn't you? Or would you be too frightened?"

Mary said she hadn't thought about it. She wondered if they guessed how their present willingness that she should go to Paris brought back the bitterness of the past when they had not let her go. "No," she thought, "they wouldn't think of it. They've forgotten all that."

"I wonder how you'll get on with Lowell," said Letty. "He's a perfect old woman, but after all you can't be in Paris without some sort of a man."

When she spoke of Paris she seemed to connect it in her mind with love, with lovers. She seemed to picture herself there with a lover. She threw something of this into her voice and eyes. She could never speak of Paris, or of Venice where she had once spent an innocent fortnight with Maud and Mrs. Cotter, without making Nelson feel that he was the necessary daily loaf and that she had an appetite for cake. When they were in Paris

together he was still more conscious of it. She changed the instant she set foot in it. She did not treat him as if he were her husband and the father of her children, but rather as if he were someone with whom she had come to Paris clandestinely, for the sake of some charming, surreptitious affair. She became full of whims, of coquetry, more like a mistress than a wife. Across the little tables of expensive restaurants she would flash him looks that he knew were not for him; looks that he received vicariously; looks that she would have given to a lover. If they went—as they sometimes did when they were in Paris—to a nightclub, she danced with him in a way that she would not have danced in London. It always ended by his becoming jealous of himself, because she was treating him like someone he was not; because she was pretending he was the man she would have put in his place if she could.

Because of Letty he hated Paris. It had been her cherished background as a child; it had been the undoing of her father; and he guessed that in Letty—and this was part of his painful over-possessive love for her—her father's blood might yet speak.

Now Letty could not let the subject of Paris rest. It seemed that the thought of Mary there amused and diverted her. The two appeared to her deliciously incompatible and she proposed to extract such harmless entertainment from it as she could.

"Well, I hope you find yourself a young man there," she said, musically. "It won't be any fun being with Maud and Lowell all the time. Much as I love Maud, I must admit that she'd take the romance out of anything. She almost took the romance out of Venice."

And Mary, looking back at her silently, thought,

"What happiness it will be not to hear that voice any longer, never again to hear talk of 'romance' from someone who is as hard as the diamond on her hand."

"But get a rich one," Letty went on, exhaling cigarette smoke through her pretty, fierce little nose. "A poor one is no good in Paris. Best of all, try and find a rich, old one. Every girl ought to have a rich old adorer before she marries, someone who knows his way about; a real *homme du monde*."

Nelson interrupted her, and there was a slight harshness in his voice, a harshness that was meant to hide pain, or disapproval.

"I'm afraid I never gave you that opportunity, unless you were more precocious than I think you were." Letty put out her cigarette and her hand went towards a big silver box to take another. She was smoking far too much lately, he thought. He stopped her, irritably. "Don't light another cigarette. Dinner must be ready. If it isn't it ought to be."

"No, darling, you came too soon," said Letty, obeying him. She looked at him sweetly, rounding her lips and added, "But I was lucky. I got an *homme du monde* and everything else I wanted besides."

Mary spoke to hide her unease, her embarrassment.

"Maud says we might go to the coast of Brittany for a few days."

"Good," said Nelson, as Shaw came in to announce dinner. "Though I'm afraid it will be too cold to bathe."

"Make her take you to Dinard," said Letty as she got up. "Do you remember, darling, we nearly went there on our honeymoon?"

She threw something into the word that made Mary

look away from her. She conjured up moments of passion; her voice was cadenced with love.

"Why must she be always acting?" she wondered. "Is it because she has so much to hide?" And then she thought, "Only six more days and nights here. Only six more."

At dinner Nelson asked Letty if she had written a letter of condolence that she had promised to write. She put on a remorseful look.

"I'm afraid I haven't yet, darling. I do so hate writing letters of condolence. But, of course, I will. I'll do it immediately after dinner."

"You should always write such letters promptly," he said.

"I know, darling. How right you are! I'll go upstairs and write it in my boudoir where I can't hear you talking."

She did as she promised and Nelson and Mary went into the library together. Sometimes Nelson forgot and still referred to it as his den, but Letty never. She was capable of far more alteration and adaptation than he was, provided that she herself did the remodelling. The stuff of which she was made was sacred; not to be touched by other hands. Nelson remained the same unless moulded by her or by outside events.

Father and daughter sat down, a little uncomfortably. Mary was seldom alone with him and did not know what to talk to him about when she was.

He began, "I'm glad you don't smoke. Letty smokes far too much."

"I was always told I mustn't smoke," she said. "Now I don't want to."

"Very wise of you," he said. After a little silence

he said, "I'm glad you've decided to go to Paris with Maud Cotter. I've thought for some time that a change would do you good."

"Perhaps it will," Mary said. "I hope so."

"If you want more money," he told her, "you've only got to write and say so. Don't let yourself run short."

"I shan't need any more, thank you," she said. And she thought, "I wonder what will happen when the hundred is gone? I'm not going to take any more from him."

"Don't you want to buy yourself some clothes while you're over there?" he asked, labouring on.

Mary shook her head. "No, thank you, father. I'll make what I have do. You know I'm not very much interested in clothes."

He was smoking a cigar and at the same time nursing some brandy in a great goblet in his left hand. Now and again he lifted it to his nose and sniffed its aroma, then took a sip.

"It's a pity, isn't it," he presently asked, "not to care about clothes when you're young, and when you can afford to buy them? Oughtn't you to try to make the best of yourself?"

"I don't know," said Mary. "I don't think I know what my best is. And I really don't like the bother of clothes. They worry me." And then she added, "So long as I look tidy, does it matter? I wouldn't like to look untidy."

"You're very like your mother," he said, and there was a note in his voice that was unfamiliar to her.

"I don't know what my mother was like, or what she cared about," Mary said.

He was silent for a moment, and then he said .

"She was religious. That sort of thing. She kept it to herself a good deal, but I should say she cared more about that than anything else."

"Then I'm not very like her," Mary said. "I don't think I'm very religious. I wasn't brought up to be, was I?"

He looked quickly at her. "Weren't you? You went to Sunday school and to church, didn't you?"

"Only as long as I wanted to go," Mary answered. "When I stopped wanting to go, the whole thing was dropped. Except now and then at Easter or Christmas, or when I went to St. Paul's to hear the music, I don't think I've been to church since I was fourteen."

"Oh. Then you think that was a mistake?" He looked into his brandy glass, avoiding her eyes.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't suppose it matters, really. If I felt the need of religion I'd turn to it, I expect. People do, don't they?"

Both were now embarrassed. He said, with a little cough, "I suppose they do. Or some of them."

"Well," she said, "I meant some of them."

A silence fell, awkward, difficult to break. Then he said with an almost visible effort .

"Anyway, I hope you enjoy yourself in Paris. Have as good a time as you can."

"I sometimes wonder," Mary said, "if I know how to have a good time. I don't believe I do."

He looked at her with a puzzled frown.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," she said, "what is a good time? How does one go about getting it? I really don't think I know."

With a slight irritation he said, "What I mean is, I hope you won't have a dull time."

"Oh," she said, "I'm sure it won't be dull. It would be my own fault if I had a dull time."

"I have a very high opinion of Maud Cotter," he said. "I hardly know Pierce, of course. He seems to me quite ineffectual."

"He's rather like me," said Mary.

Before he could reply Letty came downstairs and into the room. She held the letter in her hand.

"Here it is, darling," she said gaily. "I'll read it to you."

Nelson made a quick gesture with the hand that held the cigar and said, "No, no. Don't read it, please!"

"But I want your approval."

"You can't read a letter like that aloud," he told her.

"But darling, it's no one we know very well. All right, then, you take it and read it to yourself."

"Seal it up," he said. "Seal it up."

She ran her tongue along the flap of the envelope.

"I was rather pleased with it. However, here goes. Mary, put it on the hall table, will you, for Shaw to post?"

When Mary came back into the room again she heard Letty say.

"Darling, I have an idea. Why shouldn't you and I go to Paris while Maud's there? Just for a long week-end, from Thursday to Tuesday, say. Do you realise I haven't been to Paris for nearly six months? Couldn't we, darling? If there's a war, it may be our last chance."

"I don't know," he said. "I'm very busy just now. I don't see how it's possible."

"I don't mean just now. I mean a little later, perhaps in two or three weeks."

"I'll think about it," he said.

"We'll regret it terribly if we don't go, and there's a war. We may be cooped up in England for years."

"Well," he said, "we'll see."

Mary guessed that he would do what Letty asked. In their different ways and for their different purposes they knew how to gain concessions from each other. Each was glad to indulge the other, or thought it wise to indulge the other, when indulgence did not cost too much in the way of sacrifice. The fear that was for ever at the back of his mind, a fear that Mary had only recently guessed at, since suffering had sharpened her eyes, would incline him to indulge her in this, as in other things.

"Then," she thought, "I must do what I have to do before they come," and felt a little hurried, a little breathless and pressed for time. She ran over, in her mind, a variety of possibilities. Her French, thanks to Mademoiselle Drieux and the years in Switzerland, was excellent. She might become a music teacher in some provincial town, or a teacher of English; or she might find a post for herself as companion. Her aims were modest; work to do, a place to sleep, money enough to enable her to live, however frugally. Why want anything more, ever? To want more was to court disappointment, misery. She would know how to keep her wants in check now, down to the very minimum.

The dinner party for Maud and Lowell was like all Letty's dinner parties. The food, drink, service, flower

decorations were lavish, and of the best quality. Letty told Lowell, as they stood by the fireplace in the drawing-room, waiting for the other guests to arrive, that she had not asked people whom he and Maud might find congenial for the simple reason that she didn't know any, so she had asked people whose hospitality she was obliged to repay.

"They're all low-brows," she said, with her disarming little air of defiance and pride, "so don't expect anything else. We don't know any high-brows. Nelson wouldn't like them and I wouldn't know what to talk to them about."

"My own brow," Lowell said, "has been getting gradually lower and lower, till I sometimes wonder where it's going to end. I just don't want to talk to anybody who makes demands on my so-called intelligence. I want to be amused, flattered, soothed and comforted."

"Well, thank God I put you next to Selma, then. She can do all those things for you, and carry on a flirtation with some man across the room at the same time. She's a marvel. Her husband's one of the richest men in Sweden. I like Swedes, they're so practical. They always seem to know what they want." She added, as if wishing to shock or startle, "And the rich ones are so very rich."

"Is she beautiful, or is she clever?" Lowell asked. His heart was troubling him a little; he had been doing too much. He wondered how early he and Maud would be able to get away.

"She's certainly beautiful. You'll know better than I would whether she's clever or not. If ever Nelson walks out on me I think it would be with Selma—

though mind you, I've seen no indication that she'd be willing."

"Or that he would?" Lowell suggested, but she let it pass. Her words made him doubt, for the first time, the durability of her marriage, and it surprised him that she herself was not sufficiently superstitious as to avoid such utterances, however lightly spoken. Happy wives, he thought, did not joke about these things. He grew suddenly more interested in the two of them. But if there were to be any walking out, he thought, it would be La Bovary who would take that step.

He asked her who else was coming.

"Lord and Lady Cuxhaven. Over sixty and desperately dull, but their son's just become one of Nelson's partners." She gave her pretty, fierce little laugh. "It cost them a hell of a lot, too. Then there's Sir Godfrey Widdemer. He's the man who wants Nelson to go into Parliament. His wife's very deaf, but he won't go anywhere without her. However, I'll see that you don't have to talk to her. Then there are two people who are about to get a divorce, and there'll be a fine scandal when they do, I can tell you. She says this will be their last meal together. They're the Hammersleys, the Gideon Hammersleys. I suppose the name doesn't mean anything to you. They've got an enormous place in Yorkshire that's supposed to have been designed by somebody or other, but I always forget who."

"Inigo Jones," he suggested.

"Probably," she said. "She tells me it's all that's kept them together, but now she's bored with it. Then there's a young man from the office for Mary. Quite

harmless, and useful as a fill-in. I couldn't find anybody else." She looked toward the door with a little frown. "Where on earth is she? She's always late. Thank God she isn't my daughter." She added, warmly: "It's so good of you and Maud to take her to Paris with you. I can't tell you how grateful we are."

"We like her," said Lowell.

"It's just like Maud, she's such an angel, and she knows perfectly well how difficult Mary is. By the way, I don't know how long you want to stay, but Nelson and I will probably be coming over to Paris in a few weeks, and we can take her off your hands then, if you feel you want to be by yourselves again."

"I don't know what arrangements Maudie's made," he said, "but I guess Mary can stay with us as long as she likes."

"Well, you're perfect angels," she said. "Both of you."

"Tell me some more about the Hammersleys," he asked, hopefully. "There seems to be a good story there."

But before she could reply they were announced; a tall, sleek, horsey-looking pair who seemed to Lowell so perfectly matched that he wondered how they could hope to find more suitable partners. Splendidly null, he thought, and if they were a foretaste of what was to come he heartily wished himself back at the hotel, comfortably in bed with a novel. As the other guests arrived he made the discovery that none of them appeared to be at all interested in any of the others. They were there to eat a good dinner; possibly to avoid the greater boredom of dining at home. Eyes met eyes coldly and blankly. This was all there was or would

be ; nullity. Not only, he told himself, would he and Maud meet no one they were likely to want to see again ; there was also no hope that they would extract any amusement from this gathering. There was not even the hope that anyone would tell a mildly improper story ; that anyone would use the wrong fork, that anyone would get drunk. He avoided dinner parties at home on the grounds of ill-health and only accepted invitations to lunch ; one could escape early from a lunch party without rudeness by hinting at business affairs that must be attended to. At dinners he dreaded both the masculine talk around the table after the women had gone upstairs, and the arid interval in the drawing-room before one could decently go home. "Come and talk to Mrs. Thingummy," the hostess invariably said, removing him from some seat he had taken for reasons best known to himself and putting him into another. Even the arrival of the Swedish couple failed to improve matters. She was certainly lovely and had an accent that was highly agreeable, but she too was merely walking through a dull part that she had played too many times before, and at dinner she chiefly quoted her husband's views about the international situation. He watched La Bovary, as he privately called Letty, and was mildly entertained by her somewhat exaggerated charm. "Every inch of her a hostess," he thought. "And behind that pretty, affected manner she's bored crazy with the whole thing. The only real people here are Mary, that young man, who looks scared to death, Maudie, the deaf woman, and my humble self. Maybe Nelson's real, but I have my doubts. Or maybe he could have been if he hadn't married La Bovary. Poor Mary, what a home to grow up in !"

After dinner he went straight to the deaf woman, Lady Widdemer, and she smiled at him and placed her little amplifying box on the table between them. He found her very good company and when Letty came and proposed that he should go and talk to Mrs. Hammersley he said: "My dear Letty, I'm going to stay right where I am. I'm old enough to do as I please."

He had a few words with Mary just as they were leaving.

"Are you all packed and ready?" he asked.

Her face, which had shown little animation during the evening, lit up at once.

"I'm so ready," she said, "that I could go to-night, this minute, in fact."

He patted her shoulder.

"Have a good night's sleep."

When they had all gone Letty suddenly discovered that she was in a temper. It came on her just as the door closed on the last guest. It had been a ghastly evening, she said; it had gone badly from start to finish. No one had helped her. She'd caught Maud yawning twice, and she didn't blame her. As for Mary, she said, turning upon the tired girl, she'd behaved like an unwilling guest instead of the daughter of the house. Mary stood mutely, having nothing to say in her own defence, nor even caring to defend herself.

"Never mind, never mind," said Nelson, putting out his cigar. "It went as well as most of these things do, I suppose. I don't see what Mary could have done."

"She might open her mouth now and again," snapped Letty. She had observed Mary's pallor, but it only irritated her still further. "I suppose the truth is,"

she said, "that I'm bored to death myself. I'm bored with everyone we know. I'm bored with living in London. We ought to travel more." Nervously she took and lighted a cigarette, and bending her head back, blew smoke defiantly towards the ceiling. She was thinking: "Why shouldn't I? I've got his telephone number. I only have to ring him up. Why am I such a coward? What could Nelson do, even if he did find out? He'd never let me go. I wouldn't want to go. But I can't go on like this; I'm bored, bored, bored."

Nelson was silent, with a heavy, portentous silence. Then he turned to Mary and said: "You'd better go to bed, Mary. You have to make an early start to-morrow."

Mary felt a sudden impulse of pity for the big, solid man with the too black hair. Her own sorrows had blinded her to the fact that he was perhaps not altogether happy himself. She made a movement as though to go to him and give him a good-night kiss, but he stooped to pick up the match that had missed the ash tray into which Letty had meant to throw it.

"I'll see you at breakfast, won't I?" she asked. He said that she would.

"I definitely shall not come down," said Letty. "Shaw will get you a taxi and see you off." She added: "I hope you'll have a good time. We'll probably see you over there. Good night." She turned her cheek towards Mary, and Mary, after a second's agonised hesitation, touched it with her own cheek.

When she had gone, Letty said: "Well, thank God she'll be out of the house for a few weeks. I've stood about all I can stand. I'm sorry, darling; she's your

daughter, but honestly she's got on my nerves to such an extent that I want to scream. She's just a dead weight at a party. And she's as nearly rude to me as she dares to be most of the time."

"I've never noticed any rudeness," he said coldly. "You imagine it. And listen to me, Letty. I will not have you saying you're bored either when we're alone, or in front of other people. It's damned offensive. You have everything in the world you want—a fine big house, plenty of good servants, plenty of pretty clothes, plenty of money. If you want to go abroad somewhere by yourself for a few months, you can go. I can't. I've got to stay here. But don't let me hear you speak like that again. I won't have it. Do you understand me?"

She saw that he was really angry, angry and deeply hurt, and was annoyed with herself for letting the situation get so far out of hand. It was so easy to manage him, if one followed a few simple rules. She said contritely:

"I'm sorry, darling. Really I am. I didn't mean what I said. I was disappointed with the dinner party and felt cross, that's all. Forgive me." And she went towards him with her hands held out and her head tilted supplicatingly.

"You did mean it," he said, and moved away from her.

She halted and looked reproachful.

"Darling, I swear I didn't. You know I'm not bored. Anyway, I'm never bored with you. Sometimes I wish we knew more amusing people, but I expect that's my fault."

"Certainly it is," he said. "That's up to you;

that's your affair. I've no time to look for them. All the people who came here to-night are good friends of ours, except the Hammersleys. I don't know why you asked them."

"I had to do something for them. We spent that week-end with them in Yorkshire."

"I didn't want to go. Great mausoleum of a house."

"Well, they're parting company next week, so that's that."

"They're not our sort," he said, and sat gloomily on the edge of a chair, away from her.

"Who is our sort, darling?" she asked sweetly. "What sort are we? I honestly don't think I know."

"We're ordinary, well-to-do, middle class people, and I personally don't want to be anything else."

"Well, don't make it sound so fantastically dull!" she pleaded.

He looked up angrily.

"Now look here, Letty, I've had about enough of this nonsense. If you want a different sort of life you'll have to go elsewhere for it. You won't get it with me."

"Sweetheart!" she protested, gaily. "I'm not thinking of leaving you. I only said, 'Don't make it sound so dull.' I'm not conscious of belonging to any particular class—lower, middle or upper. I'm just Letty Hallam, and I like being Letty Hallam." She broke off to say, in a low, prettily modulated voice: "Quite honestly, darling, between you and me, I shall be happier when you've gone into politics. I'll have a real job to do then, and we'll meet different sorts of people. I'm looking forward to it very much."

"I may not stand," he said. "And if I do I may not get in. Bye-elections are tricky things."

"I'm quite sure you'll get in," she said, melodiously. "I'm really rather thrilled about it."

His face was still dark, gloomy.

"I thought you were sufficiently fond of me to like being my wife, no matter what career I chose. I suppose you'll like me better as a Conservative M.P. than as a mere business man."

"Darling, there's nothing mere about you," she said, with a laugh. "That's just absurd." But she thought: "Why is it that all men—yes, all men—regardless of age, attraction or merit, expect to be loved for themselves alone?"

He was softening a little.

"Will you promise me never again to say you're bored?"

Musically she cried: "Why, of course, darling! You mustn't take it so seriously. But I do promise, I do." She felt it was safe to approach him now, and was relieved when he got up from the chair and put his arms around her.

"Letty, you do worry me. Sometimes I wonder if you love me at all. You know how I love you. No one else seems to matter—not even the children—compared with you."

"But sweetheart, I feel the same way. We must never quarrel. It's so silly. I do love you, you know, in my own undemonstrative fashion. I wish I were different, for your sake, but there it is; I'm not."

"I like you as you are," he said, and added, with a smile that was almost a grimace, "or as I think you are."

She rubbed her cheek against his. "Well, if you don't know me by now, darling, you never will."

He kissed her, patted her back and released her.

"You'll be happier with Mary out of the house for a bit. I know you and she haven't got much in common, and you've been very good and patient with her. I do wish she'd marry."

"Perhaps she'll pick up someone in Paris. You never know."

They went slowly up the stairs. When they had gone, Shaw came up to put out the lights and lock up. There was a big bowl of white lilacs on the piano, and he put his face down into the flowers and inhaled great draughts of the scent.

"Wouldn't she be wild if she saw me?" he said aloud, like a stage butler speaking an old-fashioned monologue. "Wouldn't it be forgetting myself I am? Wouldn't it be stealing maybe?" He collected the ash trays, still talking to himself. Letty always knew when cigar ends and ashes had been left in the room overnight no matter how well it was aired in the morning. He locked up, switched off the lights and went downstairs, still muttering, and the house seemed to close its eyes and compose itself for sleep.

4

P ARIS was being swept by wind and rain when they arrived, and Mary was glad. The dripping trees, the flapping awnings, the scurrying crowds, clinging to their umbrellas, suited her mood. They reached the hotel wet from the brief crossing of the pavement from cab to doorway, and shook the raindrops from their hats and coats.

"What a welcome," said Maud. Lowell announced that he was going straight to bed and would stay there till lunch-time the following day. "You girls do just what you like," he said. "Those are my plans."

Their rooms were all on the same floor, but were not adjoining. Maud told Mary how difficult she and Lowell usually found it to get separate rooms. "They always want to push us into a double room if we arrive together," she said. "They seem to think there's something abnormal or immoral about sleeping alone. Or maybe it's just economy. I never know."

She glanced at Mary's face and thought: "Dear me, I hope she isn't a prude. I don't like prudes. The virgin body is no rarity at home, but the virgin mind is. I believe they're apt to go together in England."

It was not long before Maud discovered that books had taken up a large amount of space in Mary's luggage. She had arranged a row of them on her mantelpiece and another row on a table in the window. The majority,

she noted, were books of poetry; Blake, Donne, Milton, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Housman, George Herbert and one or two anthologies. She also saw a Concise Oxford Dictionary and a history of France. "Well," she thought, "I know more about her than I did before. But why on earth did she bring so many books, as if she was going to a desert island?"

She spent the day after their arrival in getting in touch with friends and making appointments with art dealers. Her engagement book soon showed many entries. On the third day she said to Mary, "Come with me and help me buy a new hat. You'd better buy one too. You'll need one of those amusing little affairs made up of a few flowers and a bit of tulle. And I've got my eye on an afternoon dress for you, as well." For she proposed that Mary should be included in all invitations of a social sort. The girl made no objections. To be told to buy clothes by Maud was not the same as being told by Letty. She went with her without demur and even allowed Lowell to make her a few small presents—a new handbag, some bits of costume jewellery, a scarf or two. Lowell with his comfortable, old womanish ways, Maud with her forceful character and robust good humour made acquiescence easy.

Lowell was haunted by the idea that he was seeing Paris for the last time and though he did not put this belief into words it was in his eyes as he sat in the sun in the Luxembourg Gardens, wandered slowly about Montmartre, visited the Louvre and the Musée Cluny and again and again took himself and sometimes Mary to Notre Dame and along the quays. He made it a point to lunch and dine at all his favourite restaurants, and to renew his acquaintance with various restaurateurs

and *mâitres d'hôtel*. He mistrusted his French and never spoke it, while Maud spoke it fluently, with assurance and without any attempt at a French accent. Everybody understood her perfectly and she was without self-consciousness. But Lowell was happiest when not speaking to strangers at all. It was as if he wished to absorb silently, through all his senses, the Frenchness of France, to be laved by it, to take it in through his very pores. What he chiefly valued when abroad was un-American-ness. He loved his own country with a pure ardour, with passion, but when away from it he wanted to steep himself in all that was its opposite. He and Maud and Mrs. Cotter had once spent a winter in Mexico and he had found un-American-ness there in such abundance that he said he wanted to roll in it, like a cat in catmint. Signs of the Americanisation of Paris distressed him; he averted his eyes from them. He had a horror of air travel because he said that all airports were the same. Railway stations still had character, the character of the country they were in, but the similarity of airports was a menace; this similarity would radiate out from them until some dreadful uniformity had been achieved. But then, he consoled himself, he would not be there to see it.

Mary found that after a few days in Paris her hatred of Letty was losing its sharpness, its power over her, not because she was away from Letty—she had been away from her before—but because she was never going back to her. Always before she had known that the war between them, a polite, cold war waged on Mary's side by evasiveness, by being, when in Letty's presence, mentally and spiritually absent, would be resumed. Now that she did not propose to re-cross

the Channel, Letty was receding a little, but slowly. During this temporary suspension, this brief pause in her life, she could enjoy, even had other things been lacking, the blessed absence of a woman she despised. And other things were not lacking. She took pleasure in the easy relationship between Maud and Lowell, in their old, tough friendship and in their banter which, though it sometimes did not lack tartness, was never acrimonious. She wrote a polite letter to her father, thanking him for having made the trip possible, and then, feeling that she should warn him so that later, on remembering her letter, he would feel that she had tried to give him some hint of her intention, she said :

"I feel it is time I ceased to be a responsibility and an anxiety to you. If my health allows it, I hope to make myself financially independent in some way. Perhaps like a good many of my hopes it won't come to anything, but I am thinking of it a great deal."

To which he replied :

Dear Mary,

I don't know what you mean by saying you want to be independent. Have I ever shown any anxiety on this score? You are my daughter, and I am glad to do whatever I can for you. I am always ready to give you whatever you need. You have not asked for very much, but that is not my fault. When you marry it will be time then to think of being independent. But first we must get you well. Letty and I may be in Paris before long, and then we can bring you back with us. I am glad you are having a pleasant time.

Your affectionate

Father.

Why, Mary wondered, did he not want to let her go? She was an awkward, difficult member of his household, and he had shown her little affection. She was sure he had not loved her mother inordinately; that he had loved her far less than he loved Letty. It could not be that he wanted to keep her there because she was a link between her dead mother and himself. She knew little of her mother, his first marriage was a subject he had always avoided; nor did she know a single one of her mother's relations, if any were living. It might be, she thought, that he was merely possessive; it might be that knowing he could not dominate Letty, he derived satisfaction from dominating her. Well, it had all come to an end now.

Among Maud's acquaintances was a certain old Jewess named Madame Levy-Legasse. She lived in the Place des Vosges, in a large apartment overflowing with furniture and pictures. She lived, in fact, in the midst of a remarkable museum. She was an ugly old woman now, covered with loose, pendulous flesh and her great coffee-coloured eyes were made tragic by the semi-circular bags that hung beneath them. Her collection of pictures was famous, and she had lately made up her mind to sell it and send her large family of married daughters and their husbands, children and grandchildren to America. There would be war, she insisted, and who could tell what would happen? There were appeasers in France, she openly said, who would willingly hand the Jews wholesale over to the Germans for the price of peace. Maud thought she suffered from hallucinations, but she had long coveted one of her Renoirs, a Rouault or two and a Camille Pissaro. Nothing had excited her so much since coming to Paris as the news that Madame Levy-Legasse

had decided to sell. But apart from that, she liked the old woman, and gladly accepted an invitation to lunch, an invitation that included Lowell and Mary.

It was Madame Levy-Legasse's custom to go to bed every night at eight, and to entertain only at lunch, a custom of which Lowell warmly approved. The three arrived to find six other guests already there and more expected. Mary had never seen anyone like their hostess before. She might have stepped, she thought, straight out of the Old Testament. Only Rembrandt could have painted her as she was now, wearing her old silks and velvets that belonged to no period, a turban arranged on her head of dyed hair, and jewels of Oriental magnificence on her great loose neck and bosom, in her big, pendulous ears and on her creased old fingers and fat wrists. But in spite of all this, Mary saw that she was an old enchantress, and that she had once been beautiful, richly, generously beautiful. She moved slowly, heavily, but with a sort of Oriental calm among her furniture and tapestries and majolicas and paintings. Among the other guests was a famous French poet, an elderly man, with a fine head and an air of elegant fastidiousness. There was also a painter and his wife, good bourgeois types; a small, thin Jewess who was said to be an eminent child psychologist; a fashionable young actress whom Mary thought repulsively artificial and mannered. Then there presently came in a man of perhaps sixty to whom Madame Levy-Legasse advanced with arms outstretched and whom she kissed warmly on both cheeks. She said, in her low, hoarse voice, "You all know Paul, I think." Maud had met him before and so it appeared had Lowell, though he had to be reminded of the fact. Then Madame Levy-Legasse brought him to Mary, who was sitting on a

small sofa covered with needlework representing one of the kings of France at a boar hunt, introduced him as M. Karsky and left him there, saying that they were to sit together at lunch. Mary looked nervously at him with the dread she always felt when about to begin a conversation with a stranger. He was neither tall nor short ; neither fat nor thin, but a well knit, muscular, middle-sized man who seemed to be in almost blatantly good health. His vigorous hair, which had once been fair, was now chiefly grey, as was his moustache, but his face was freshly coloured and his somewhat prominent blue eyes animated.

While Mary was wondering what to say to him he turned his gaze on her, a look in which she saw irony and amusement and friendliness, and asked :

“What are *you* doing here in this museum ?”

A little startled she said :

“I’ve come to lunch, like you. Why ?”

“Ah, good, you speak excellent French. I speak no English. Why ? Because one does not expect to meet here anyone so young, so fresh, and if I may judge from appearances, so innocent.” He laughed as he said this, and added, “You see, I am frank.”

A little offended by the word “innocent,” she said, “Perhaps you judge too much by appearances,” and then wished it unsaid. But he let it pass instead of pursuing it further, as she feared he might, and asked :

“Tell me your name. I only heard my own.”

She told him and he repeated, with unctuous pleasure and a complete inability to asperate :

“Mary ’Allam, Mary ’Allam. A name out of an English novel. It is simple, charming. As you see, I am a very old man. How old you will know when I tell you that I knew our hostess when I came to France

as a young man of eighteen. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on. That was over forty years ago."

~ "I'm sure she was beautiful," Mary said. She indicated a painting on a near-by wall and said, "That's a portrait of her, I suppose."

The picture showed a young woman of perhaps twenty-five, rosy, voluptuous, with the lavish beauty that suggests the ability to bear children easily and often, and the tendency to put on flesh in early middle age. The splendid dark eyes looked out from the shadow of a drooping Leghorn hat trimmed with roses, and roses were spilling out of the basket she carried.

"There are better portraits than that," said M. Karsky. "The one by Renoir is the best of all, but that is in the house of one of her daughters. For me she still has charm. She has gathered to herself all her conquests, all her countless joys and sorrows, all her memories, and to-day she is like a great casket, a Pandora's box that contains everything. Now she is making ready for the end like a queen who knows she has not much longer to live. She is an ancestress; she is also a prophetess of woe." He broke off to take a gold toothpick out of his pocket. He removed something from between his teeth, and then, returning the toothpick to his pocket, went on, "She is like that matchless parent, the eider duck; she plucks the feathers from her breast to keep her children warm. She believes there will be war and that her people will suffer as never before, so she is planning her children's future and that of their children while there is still time."

As if she knew they were speaking of her, Madame Levy-Legasse crossed the room to them and bending down, a movement which set necklaces and ear-rings

swinging, placed both fat, creased, jewelled hands on her old friend's knees.

"Be kind to this young girl, dearest Paul," she said. "She is a stranger here, but there are other reasons. She is a musician, a pianist, and see, poor child, she can no longer play." Lifting her hands from M. Karsky's knees, she took Mary's hand and showed it to him. "A taxi accident. Miss Cotter has been telling me." She carried Mary's hand to her great loose velvet-covered bosom and there fondled it. "What a tragedy, at the beginning of a brilliant career! One can see she has talent, it is in the eyes, the forehead, the cheekbones." With her free hand she touched Mary's face lightly here and there with a vague forefinger. "But courage, my child, courage. Sometimes life takes away only to give. Be patient." She released the hand with a tender smile and said, "I must collect my guests. Luncheon is served."

Mary had felt scarcely any embarrassment during this little episode. Instead she felt oddly relaxed and at ease as if some inner and painful stiffness had gone from her.

"People say she has a heart of gold," said M. Karsky as they got up. "She has nothing of the sort. If she had, she would probably have sold it. It is a heart of warm flesh and blood."

Mary saw that Lowell was sitting between Madame Levy-Legasse and the actress, the young woman of alarming artificiality. Between these two he looked small, diminished, tired. Maud was between the painter and the art critic, a stout, dark-skinned man who wore a wrinkled tweed suit, a great ruby ring and a gold watch chain. She was obviously having a very good time. Mary wondered why it was that she herself did

not feel shy with these people. It must be, she thought, because they did not judge her; she was not expected to conform to any particular standard or pattern. They had come together to talk, to speak their minds, to pay homage to a remarkable woman and to eat a superlatively good lunch. They argued with good nature, they disagreed strongly, but there was something fraternal in their verbal strife. A good deal of the time she listened to M. Karsky, who seemed to wish to tell her about himself, and had a great deal to say. He was Russian by birth, the son of a wealthy father who had come to Paris with his wife and son on a visit, and had lived there the rest of his life. The father had remained a subject of the Tzar, but M. Karsky had become a naturalised Frenchman at twenty-one. He had never wished to live anywhere but in Paris. He had been twice married, each time to Frenchwomen, and both his daughters had married Frenchmen of title. His world was the literary and art world of Paris. He collected Chinese porcelains and walnut furniture of the sixteenth century. He played tennis, real tennis, he explained to her, as played by the kings of France, and rode every morning in the Bois. She gathered that he was very rich.

Not accustomed to attention from a man of M. Karsky's age and experience, Mary was pleased and flattered. His approval was precious to her, and she thought the better of herself for having gained it, even for an hour. When he asked all three of them to dine at his house she awaited Maud's reply with some anxiety, but she need have had no fears, for it appeared that Maud had long wanted to see his porcelains and furniture.

"She seems to have made a conquest of that old

roué," said Lowell that night. He was having his dinner in bed, and Maud had gone in to see that he was all right. "What's he up to? Mary isn't the sort of girl you'd expect a man like that to take to."

Maud said she'd never heard anything against him. His two daughters were very much part of the fashionable world of Paris, and he was known to be a generous patron of the arts.

"He must be well over sixty," Maud said. "I understand there was something more than friendship many years ago between him and Madame Levy-Legasse."

"I don't think we ought to encourage him," Lowell said.

"There's no question of encouraging him," Maud told him. "If he cares to be polite and to entertain us, I see no objection." She added, with a laugh, "He's just what Letty wanted Mary to have—a rich old beau."

"Well, she's your responsibility, not mine." Suddenly he sat up in bed, nearly upsetting his tray. "Maudie, I nearly forgot to tell you. Who do you think I saw in the lobby this afternoon when I was getting some stamps?"

"I can't imagine," she said, idly turning the watch on her wrist. "Who?"

"Mrs. Martin Brewster, the widow of the man who founded your gallery. At least I think it was Mrs. Brewster. Do you know if she's over here?"

Maud looked at him fixedly, and her eyes had gone blank and reticent.

"I suppose it could be Mrs. Brewster. She's somewhere in Europe with a daughter. I didn't know you knew her."

"I don't know her," he said, "or only by sight, and I suppose she knows me by sight. She looked at me

the way people do look when they're not sure whether they know you or not. She's a great friend of my friends the Warrinders, whom you always refused to meet for some reason."

"We can't always like each other's friends," she said. "I've got very good friends who don't mean a thing to you."

"Well, but suppose it was Mrs. Brewster," he went on. "I'd like to talk to her. I want to ask her if it's true that the Warrinders' marriage is breaking up."

"Now look, Lowell," said Maud, suddenly brisk and decisive, "keep away from Mrs. Brewster if you don't want to spoil our stay. She's a bore. I don't want to know her and I don't intend to know her. I heard before we left home that she was over here with one of her daughters. She doesn't need our society and we don't need hers. Just let her be."

He raised his eyebrows, creasing his high, bare forehead. "I don't know why you're so ferocious about her. You certainly do strain at gnats and swallow whole camels."

"I suppose Madame Levy-Legasse is the camel," Maud said. "Well, she doesn't live in Boston and Mrs. Brewster does. Anyway, she's a real person. You won't like Janet Brewster, and when you get back home you'll wish you'd taken my advice and let her alone. I don't want to know her in France or in Boston or anywhere else. She's a bore."

"Maudie," he said, puzzled, "I never knew you to have such a down on a perfectly harmless woman. What if she is a bore? Lots of people we know are bores. I ought to write to Bill Warrinder about some of my investments and I want to find out first how things are between him and Cathy."

"Yes, but you know just how it will be," said Maud, more temperately. "She'll attach herself to us. I just won't have it, Lowell."

"The daughter might be nice for Mary to know."

"Equally she mightn't. They probably wouldn't have a thing in common."

He looked disgruntled. "Oh, all right, all right. Go down and get your dinner now. It must be getting late."

"You needn't look so aggrieved," she said. "If you didn't want to meet someone I'd take good care that you didn't meet them. Why can't you be equally accommodating?"

"I said 'all right,' " he repeated, more loudly.

"That doesn't mean a thing. Are you going to speak to her or aren't you?"

"I won't promise anything." He pushed aside his tray and got down further under the bedclothes as if he wished to disappear. "You've spoilt my dinner. I don't want any more."

"Now, Lowell, don't you try to start a quarrel with me," Maud protested. "I'm only asking a small thing of you. If you don't speak, she won't. I only ask you to leave her alone."

"Yes, but you haven't told me why."

"I tell you she's a bore. I know she's a bore. We'll never get rid of her."

"There's some other reason."

"All right, if you say so."

There was a moment's silence, and then he said:

"Maudie, why won't you tell me?"

"I have told you," she said. "She'll spoil all our fun."

"I didn't object when you wanted to bring Mary over here. I might have said the same thing."

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

"You were very sweet about it. But has she spoilt our fun?"

"Never mind about Mary," he said. "We're discussing Mrs. Brewster."

"Well, I'm not. I'm going down. I expect Mary's waiting." She got up from the foot of his bed and moved towards the door. "Go ahead and talk to her if you want to," she said. "I can always go to another hotel."

"Fine," he said. "Just ring for them to take away my tray, will you?"

"No, I won't," she said. "You finish your dinner like a good boy." She went back to the bed and bending over him she kissed his forehead. "You old silly. What's Janet Brewster to you?"

"What's she to you?" he asked, looking up at her.

"She's nothing to me. She's certainly not worth an argument. Go ahead and talk to her if you're feeling lonely, or if you're sick of just being with me."

He caught her hand.

"Maudie, if I had another fifty years to live I'd like to spend every minute of them with you. You know it."

"Well, then," she said.

"Because I like you better than anyone in the world and always will, it doesn't mean that I wouldn't like a gossip with Mrs. Brewster about Bill Warrinder and Cathy."

"All right," she said, and turned to the door again. "Go right ahead, both of you. Get together and take down your back hair and have a good time. I can always move."

"You're crazy," he said.

"Well, we'll leave it at that," was her reply. She opened the door and then shut it softly behind her. She heard him call out, "Maudie!" but she didn't go

back. She went on down to dinner. Her heart was beating as if it were a tightly stretched drum with an erratic drummer inside it. "Damn Janet Brewster," she said to herself. "Why can't I be indifferent to her? She was always there. Why can't I come to terms with my conscience about her? I don't even know that I ever did her any harm."

The next day as she was at the desk inquiring for letters her eyes met the eyes of a young girl of twenty or so who was handing in her key. There were Martin's eyes, his look, his forehead. He became so vividly present to her that she leaned against the counter, trembling. How the photograph she carried about with her everywhere had lied to her! It was Martin on a certain day, in a certain mood, a poor fragment of Martin, incapable of evoking him as this girl did. Looking at her she knew it was better to have no photograph, to let the untrammelled memory have its way. This daughter of his increased her knowledge of her dead lover. She would have given years of her life to have been able to keep her beside her, to refresh herself daily in what only this girl could give her. Sick with longing, she turned away and went to her room. There were no words possible between Martin's daughter and herself.

She lived the next few days in some suspense. At any moment Lowell might run across Janet Brewster, and she still did not know what he would do. He was in no hurry to tell her and remained aloof. He had been hurt and wanted her to know it, though he took care to show nothing of his feelings before Mary.

M. Karsky continued to show them attentions. To Maud he frankly admitted his interest in her young friend, and asked a great many questions about her.

He had never met, he said, a young woman in the least like her; so undeveloped, with so much potential yet unrealised charm; so inhibited, to use, he said, a sadly overworked term. If he at first showed her kindnesses to please Madame Levy-Legasse, who had been shocked by the story Maud had told her, he now continued them for quite other reasons. "She needs to be given confidence," he said to Maud, "confidence in herself as a woman. She requires to be given a picture of herself that is not displeasing to her. Only we others can do that. After all, it is what we live by, this picture that others make for us. Is that not so?"

Maud wished him twenty-five years younger, for she thought it might be a long time before Mary found another such understanding admirer. At the same time she fulfilled her duties as chaperone conscientiously, for she guessed that he was a man of many amorous affairs.

"I suppose you know what you're doing," Lowell grumbled to her one day, "letting him see so much of Mary. He's got an eye for the girls."

"What makes you think Mary would stand any nonsense from him?" Maud asked.

"She just wouldn't know," he answered.

He also thought it advisable to drop a hint to Mary.

"I wish you knew some young people here," he said. "It can't be much fun for you seeing so much of a man of Karsky's age."

"Oh," she said, "I like him. He knows such a lot and I can just sit and listen to him talk."

"Well," he said dubiously, "I suppose he's all right, and not just a rich old libertine."

She gave him a quick, surprised look.

"What makes you say that?"

"He might be, mightn't he?"

She said: "I don't know. He's awfully kind. I can't think why he goes to all this trouble unless it's to please Madame Levy-Legasse."

"Don't be so darned humble," he told her. "How do you know it isn't just to please himself?"

She shook her head. "You can't make me believe he has any special interest in me."

"Look," he said, "what's wrong with you? You're young, aren't you? And you get better-looking every day."

She gave a little laugh and said: "I'm afraid it isn't much use trying to build up my self-esteem."

"You're crazy," he said. "Don't you ever look in the glass?"

"Yes," she said, "and I see a sick-looking girl who isn't any good to herself or anyone else."

"You're getting morbid," he protested.

"No," she said, "I don't think I'm morbid. It's just that I can't deceive myself."

"You've been a whole lot better since you've been here," he told her. He felt at the same time troubled and irritated.

They were sitting in the lobby of the hotel, waiting for Maud, who was telephoning. Mary looked down at her right hand, which lay in her lap, and said, with the abruptness and inconsequence of the shy:

"Chopin's Ballade in G Minor has been running through my head all the morning. I know now how I would like to play it. Not as I used to play it, but with some changes in the tempo. My mind goes on practising and learning. I don't know how to stop it."

Before he could make any comment, Maud arrived and said: "Come along or we'll be late for lunch." And as they drove out to the Bois to lunch with

M. Karsky and one of his daughters and sons-in-law, Lowell thought: "I wish she'd snap out of it. I suppose Karsky's good for her, so I'd better not say any more." But he felt uneasy. No one is free from jealousy, and the odd and illogical forms taken by jealousy were well known to him. He was, he admitted to himself, jealous of Karsky, jealous because Maud found him amusing and because he was taking so much interest in Mary. He was jealous of his fitness, of his zest for life. Not acutely jealous, but mildly, grumbly jealous. In his own mind he called him "that fellow," and he watched him a little resentfully and suspiciously. The daughter was ugly, with a small muzzle that made him think of a griffon, but she was immensely *chic* and obviously clever. The husband was a tall, cadaverous man, spectacled and stooping, chiefly interested, it appeared, in *belles lettres*. Lowell got the impression that they were wondering why they had been invited to meet this little Anglo-American party, and while they made themselves pleasant, they showed no inclination to continue the acquaintance. But this lack of enthusiasm on their part was more than made up for by M. Karsky himself, who overflowed with talk, plans, suggestions and good stories. After lunch they walked in the Bois in the sun under the delicate and exquisite green of the trees which cast a speckled shade. The beauty of the day, the gay children who ran about and formed themselves into charming groups on the grass and under the trees, delighted Mary, but her delight was mixed with self-reproaches. What was she doing here? Where did this lead? Nowhere, that she could see. Why was she undecided, making no plans, her future as unresolved as ever it had been, and what plans could she make? She would have liked

to question M. Karsky, but she was never alone with him and was too uncertain of herself to try to make such an opportunity. Once at lunch under cover of the talk she had said to him :

"A friend of mine, a girl of about my age, would like to come and live in France and get work here. She could take care of children or act as companion to an old lady, or teach English. I think she could even give piano lessons. What do you think her chances would be ?"

He asked if she had any private means ; if not, he said, she would be running a grave risk. Had she friends ? No, Mary said. No friends, no *dot* ? No. Then, M. Karsky said, with a laugh, tell her to stay at home. And there is another reason, he said. There may be war. Mary looked at him with a swift look of alarm. Did he really think so ? His usually smiling face became grave. Did not everybody, he asked, and if not, what reasons had they for their optimism ? Mary said she didn't know ; that personally, she found it hard to believe in the possibility of war. Then she asked him what he thought would happen if there were a war.

"There will be one great power in Europe," he said, "and that power will be Germany. For us it will be finished. And for you too. That is why I laugh now, why I enjoy life now. Soon, night will come."

She repeated this part of the conversation to Maud later.

"All Russians are fatalists," Maud said. "It's in the blood. It makes no difference that he's lived here all his life. He's still a Russian." But she argued against her own convictions.

Then there came upon the little party two events, and on the same evening. Maud was asked to a large *soirée* given by a famous picture dealer. Lowell

declined to accompany her, indeed had not been asked, though she assured him she had only to say she was bringing him. No, he said, he'd been doing too much ; he'd had too many evenings out since they'd been in Paris. He had recently been to a new heart specialist who had examined him carefully and said that there was a fairly rapid deterioration and hardening of the left ventricle and that he must take great care to put no undue strain on the heart. Plenty of sleep, plenty of rest ; these were imperatives. Maud must go alone ; he was going to have dinner in bed.

Maud's engagement and Lowell's decision to spend the evening in bed interfered with M. Karsky's plans. His elder daughter and her husband were dining with him that night at a very special restaurant known, he said, to few foreigners, where there was the best chef in Europe, and he wanted Maud, Mary and Lowell to join them. On hearing that only Mary was available he asked if she might be permitted to come. Mary asked Maud's advice and Maud said : "I don't see why you shouldn't go. I believe the elder daughter's much nicer than the younger one." Mary hesitated, half inclined to stay at home and read. She felt sure she wouldn't care for either of M. Karsky's daughters, nor they for her. Why should they ? In the end she decided to go ; something, she thought, might be said that would help her to decide what her next step was to be. And time was pressing.

M. Karsky called for her in his car. His broad, healthy Slavic face with its smiling lines looked more than usually fresh. He smelled of lavender water. He wore no hat, and his thick hair seemed, in the fading light, to be more blonde than grey. In the car he looked at her and swept his moustache upwards, to the

left and the right. She was wearing a printed silk afternoon dress that Maud had persuaded her to buy. It was very cleverly made and had a little jacket of the same material trimmed with narrow, finely pleated frills. With it she wore new long suede gloves and she had put some Chanel ; that Lowell had given her on her handkerchief. She was not wearing a hat, and her hair, which had been washed and set that day, framed her face in dark and glossy abundance. She had put a little rouge on her cheeks and a little red on her lips.

"My dear child," he said, "you look charming this evening. You should really take more trouble with yourself, for when you do the effect is ravishing. Your berets, your tweeds, your walking shoes are all very well on your moors, but you have a subtle and delicate beauty which they do nothing to enhance. Like this, I assure you, you are enchanting."

She smiled at him and said: "You mustn't flatter me. I'm not used to it and it goes to my head."

"Please," he said, and his rather prominent blue eyes had reproach in them, "do not use that word. I do not flatter you. I have not spoken to you one insincere word since I have known you. Between you and me let there be frankness. With you, I can be myself. I hope that with me you will feel that you can be yourself. That is the true basis of friendship."

They presently reached the restaurant and went in. M. Karsky pointed out some pictures to her in the entrance hall. "These will amuse you," he said. They were clever caricatures of famous persons, and her eye was drawn to one of Edward VII alighting from a carriage at the door of the restaurant, resplendent in white waistcoat and grey topper, with a flower in his buttonhole. While she was looking at it M. Karsky

sent for the head waiter who hurried out to greet them with expressions of esteem and delight. Everything, he said, was ready. He believed that the dinner would exceed anything M. Karsky had ever had there before. It had received his earnest attention and his highest endeavours. M. Karsky turned to Mary and said: "Come, my dear," and she followed him, with the head waiter in the lead, up a red-carpeted staircase and along a corridor where a door was thrown open for them. Mary, a little wonderingly, saw that it was a small room with a table in it set for four.

"You will, of course, wish to wait for Monsieur and Madame," the head waiter said. "As soon as they arrive, dinner will be served. I will bring them up myself, naturally. Is there anything Monsieur would like in the meanwhile?"

M. Karsky waved away any suggestion of cocktails, of which he strongly disapproved, and the head waiter left them.

"Whenever I dine here," M. Karsky explained to Mary, "I dine like this. Below in the restaurant it is noisy, hot and usually crowded, and one might be eating the most ordinary table d'hôte dinner for all the pleasure one derives from it. This is what I like; privacy and quiet, and a perfect meal perfectly served." He glanced at his watch. "They should be here very soon. Let me take your gloves and bag."

He took them from her and laid them on the sofa, a handsome piece of Empire furniture with curved ends, and covered in worn red silk. The walls were papered in white, and the paper had a satin stripe in it. There was a large gilt mirror on one of the walls, and there was nothing else in the room except the dining table, and the four chairs.

"Sit here, my child," he said, and drew out a chair for her at the table, seating himself opposite. "I hope you will like my daughter Antoinette. She is more thoughtful," he said smiling, "*plus cérébrale*, than Lulu, who cares chiefly for society and for fashion. My son-in-law André, as you will presently see, is enormously stout, but the best-natured fellow in the world. Like me, he is a great gourmet, but unlike me, he takes no exercise." He laughed. "He does not even walk, not a step if he can avoid it."

"You're so kind to me," Mary said. "I shall be really sorry to leave Paris."

"But you must not talk of leaving Paris."

She said, wishing that she could tell him the truth: "My father and stepmother will be coming soon, and they will want to take me home with them."

"They must let you stay longer," he said. "They will, when they see how much good your visit has done you. Or they should take you to the sea for a few days, to Normandy or Brittany perhaps." And he mentioned several places, but they all sounded to Mary too large and fashionable for her purposes.

"When my daughters were children," he said, "my wife and I took a villa each summer on the Normandy coast, sometimes at one place, sometimes at another. And while we are waiting I will tell you a story of something that happened one summer night. It is not, perhaps, a story for a young girl, though it concerns a young girl, but now that we know each other better, you will not mind."

He lighted a cigarette and said:

"In the villa next to ours was an old man aged eighty-one or two, who lived there with a widowed daughter. One night in August he went quite crazy.

He climbed out on to the roof of the villa—it was one of those steep Normandy roofs—and cried out that he was the Archangel Gabriel and that everyone must come to see him fly. He was going to fly out far over the water, he said, and return. His voice was loud and very shrill, and we and all the other neighbours were awakened by it and got up and went out in our dressing-gowns. It was a very hot night, with a full moon, and there the old man stood, in his nightshirt, on the very top of one of the gables, though it was not the highest one. He seemed so certain that he could fly that I for my part thought, ‘Well, perhaps he can. And if he can’t, he is over eighty and has had a very good life.’ But my neighbours were less objective, more humanitarian, and they got ladders and ropes. But the ladders were not tall enough to reach him, and no one dared to follow him, for as soon as he saw what they were trying to do he crawled up on to the top of the highest gable of all. I myself made several attempts, but the height was too much for me; I grew dizzy and had to come down. It was a miracle how he got up there himself without falling, but of course, being more or less mad, he was without fear. Someone had sent for the fire brigade, but they had gone to a large fire at Trouville, and no one could say when they would return. Although the night was so warm there was a breeze from the sea, and we could see the old man’s beard and nightshirt fluttering. Well, it seemed that the crowd was not yet large enough to suit his purposes and he kept shouting, saying that everyone must come to watch him. The dawn came, and he was still there, and so were we. He cried out that as soon as the sun rose he would begin his flight. Then his daughter, a lady of sixty, had a brilliant idea.

An inspiration. She ran to a house not far away and woke the young daughter of a friend, a beautiful girl named—I remember quite well—Josephine Martel. She was really lovely, something quite out of the common, and she was not yet eighteen. They draped a white sheet cleverly about her body and drew about her head and throat a blue chiffon scarf. The effect was ravishing. They told her what she was to do and sent her up the ladder. From it she could step on to one of the lower gables. There she stood, holding out her arms towards the old man who did not at first see her. At last, when she had got his attention, she cried out in a clear voice : ‘Gabriel, do you not know who I am?’ And I swear to you, she looked just like the statue of the Virgin in the local church, but far more lovely. But the old man did not stir. ‘Gabriel!’ she cried, ‘come to me!’ But he only shook his head. Just then there was a gust of wind, and the young girl’s draperies, which perhaps had been too hastily arranged, blew aside. At once, the old man’s behaviour changed. He began crawling down towards her, very slowly, and looking round at her at every step. Now I think that girl behaved admirably. I shall never cease to admire her. She did not clutch the sheet about her but stood quite still, arms outstretched, like a statue. The old man kept coming down, nearer and nearer, and when he was only a foot or so away she began retreating down the ladder, still keeping her eyes fixed on him, and he, as far as he was able, keeping his eyes fixed on her. Then he also began the descent of the ladder. In this way they got down, the young girl only a few rungs below him all the way. When he was within reach she jumped to the ground and several of us closed in on him. As soon as he was safely secured that altogether

charming girl drew the sheet about her and, bursting into tears, she ran as fast as she could back to her own home. I believe that a reward of some sort was offered her by the townspeople, but she refused it. I think she felt some chagrin that the religious appeal left the old man cold, while the other, more earthly one, brought him quickly and safely down the ladder." He brushed his moustache upwards, to left and right, and added, smiling: "My admiration for Mademoiselle Martel remains undiminished through the years."

Mary, though she felt a little uncomfortable, a little disturbed, laughed at the story and said: "And is it really true?"

"Absolutely true," he said, and added, with a smile: "One might say, doubly true—true in a literal as well as a symbolic sense." He looked intently at her, then consulted his watch. "They are late. That is not like my Antoinette. She is never late."

He had hardly spoken when a waiter came in and said: "A telephone message has just come from Madame la Marquise, monsieur. She wishes me to tell you that it will be impossible for her or Monsieur le Marquis to dine with you to-night. Monsieur le Marquis is feeling very unwell with an attack of asthma, and the doctor has been sent for. She wishes me to convey to you her apologies and regrets."

"What a pity!" M. Karsky cried. "What a great pity! That poor André! It happens too often that he has these attacks. It is because he takes no exercise." He said to the waiter: "Now there is no one to wait for. You may serve dinner at once."

Mary murmured some words of regret, but inwardly felt that they would get on quite well without the daughter and son-in-law, whose arrival she had been

anticipating with some dread. As the waiter took away the extra knives, forks and spoons with neat dexterity she wondered what Maud would say to her dining so very much alone with M. Karsky. But she did not see what could be done about it, and in a few minutes the wine was brought in and the first course, a *pâté*, placed before them.

The story he had told had left a faintly unpleasant impression on her mind, but the dinner, M. Karsky's charm and *bonhomie* and the wines, to which she was unaccustomed, soon wiped out that impression. She was inclined, she thought, to be prudish; she must not be so silly as to take offence where none was intended.

A sole with a superb sauce followed the *pâté*, and he persuaded her to drink a good deal of the light, dry white wine that was served with it, though she said she thought she had better wait for the burgundy. "One does not refuse the spring," he said, gaily filling up her glass, "because the summer is coming." Then came a duck, marvellously cooked, and the bottle of burgundy, of which he advised her to drink no more than two glasses. "It will do you no harm," he told her. "It is a magnificent wine, but perhaps a trifle heavy for you." He had been telling her some anecdotes about the buying of his famous porcelains. He told stories well, without too much detail, with the right amount of exaggeration, and with a good deal of humour. She was not bored, and she guessed that he was pleased to find her such a willing listener. At the end of one of his tales he suddenly took up her right hand and raised it to his lips. "That poor little hand," he murmured. "It is what first attracted me to you. Tell me, child, how good a pianist were you? You know you may speak frankly to me."

Very conscious of the touch of his lips and moustache she dropped her hand in her lap and said, seeming to ignore the caress :

"If my health had allowed me to continue, I think I could have become a fairly successful concert pianist. That is what my teacher believed. And that, of course, would have made me very happy."

"And you would not have married?"

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't think about it in those days. I was too much occupied with my music."

"And now?"

"Even now I don't think about it. There's no one I want to marry."

He moved his chair a little nearer hers. "Like this it is friendlier," he said, smiling. "But now tell me; you say you are twenty-four—surely you cannot have reached this great age without meeting someone you felt you could love. That would be most unusual—almost, I would say, abnormal. And I am sure you are not in any way abnormal."

She said quickly, before she could rehearse and then suppress the answer :

"I did love someone once, but he didn't love me."

"Ah," he said. "That is better. I am happy to hear it. As for him, if he did not love you, he was not the right man for you. It was not the right time. Forget him, and remember only the pleasure of loving."

"The pleasure was so brief," she said, "and now it seems to have been all pain."

He made a gesture. "The pain will go. It is natural to youth. You are the better for it; the better as a woman."

As he spoke she felt the pressure of his knee against hers. A sharp distress and dread broke in upon her,

and she contrived to change her position a little. Could he be *that sort of man*? The kiss on her hand, the touch of his knee—could it mean *that*? What should she do? She must ignore it, pretend it hadn't happened, go on talking as if everything were as it had been. But it was he who went on talking. He talked about the happiness to be derived from loving and being loved. There was no joy in the world equal to it, he told her. He described his second marriage, which had been nearly perfect. His wife was some years older than himself, and when she knew that she was going to die, she said: "To live longer would be the real tragedy. It would be to risk becoming your mother rather than your wife. It is better like this." And then he added: "I can say this to you, my dear, in all humility; she adored me; she adored me."

And then once again she felt the pressure of his knee, and her fear giving her courage, she moved her chair a little. He turned and looked at her with a sort of brilliant, amused gaiety in his face.

"Come, my dear child, I shall not pursue you round the table. It is more agreeable to sit side by side than to sit facing each other. When you like someone very much, it is an added pleasure to be near them. Don't you agree? And I think you do like me?"

She murmured, utterly confused: "You know I do," and longed to add, "but not when you are like this," but heard the words in her mind and rejected them for their crudity and for the way they would have uncovered what she dared not yet admit. She tried to imagine other girls so placed; pictured them fair or dark, with this appearance or that; tried to set them in motion. But they too were confused, uncertain, incapable of taking action. She could do

nothing except sit, like a hare in its form, hoping that the danger would pass, hoping that if she ignored what she feared, it would vanish. And for the first time it crossed her mind that perhaps the daughter and son-in-law had been put off; perhaps the telephone message had been arranged.

"I can't tell you," he was saying, "how happy it makes me to hear you say that. For I believe you mean it. To be here with you like this—and how happily things have turned out for everyone except that poor André—gives me great pleasure. Of all the relationships possible between men and women, that between a young girl and an older man seems to me the most harmonious and perfect. Tell me you agree."

She said, stammering a little, that she had never thought about it; that she supposed it could be like that. And then she saw that her napkin had fallen to the floor and bent to pick it up and at the same time put a little space between them.

"Yes," he said, "it is undoubtedly the most delightful. That between a young man and an older woman can be charming too, but there is apt to be an element of doubt, of dread on the woman's side. The balance of the years is wrong and it takes away from her happiness. She cannot completely live in the present; she also lives in that future time when she will suffer from the want of him. But with two people like ourselves—what is there I cannot do for you, what pleasure or happiness I cannot give you? The young man who accepts all is soon surfeited, but the young girl who accepts all is only doing what is natural and right. You must learn to receive before you can give, when your turn comes. I say these things to explain my feelings a little, to let you know how much I would

like to do for you. And that reminds me." He laughed almost shyly, his broad, smiling face expressing a sort of gay yet self-conscious diffidence, like that of a school-boy discovered at some childish prank, and he brought out of his pocket a small box and took from it a little morocco case which he put before her, saying :

"Open it, my dear ; I chose it with much thought and care."

And wildly she asked herself again what those others would do ; the fair ones, the dark ones that she had pictured sitting there in her place ? But they, like her, sat looking at the little case in a flutter of fear, of self-abasement, at having let things reach this pass.

"Oh, no !" she managed to protest. "No, please, I don't want to be given presents. Please, I can't possibly take it."

"But open it," he insisted. "Open it. You don't even know what it is." But as she shook her head, "You are too shy ? Well then, let me. See, my dear, it is only a pretty trifle, but if you will wear it, it will give me great happiness. There is a certain elegance, I think, in the design. Of course, if convention did not forbid, I would like to give you something really lovely, really valuable. But this pretty little toy"—he made a gesture with his hand in the air above it as though it were utterly unworthy of her—"this you may accept without a thought."

It was a small cluster of two flowers, with leaves and a bud, the petals done in small rubies, the leaves in emeralds, and all set in a delicate design of platinum. She pushed the case from her, looking at him with wide, imploring eyes.

"I can't possibly, not possibly. It's lovely, but I can't take it. I'm sorry. I wish you hadn't !"

"Don't distress yourself, my child." He took up the brooch, turning it this way and that. "As I say, it is only a pretty trifle. I picked it up in a shop where I often buy things for my daughters; who would never dare"—and he smiled at her—"to treat my gifts as you have done. But I hoped you would like it."

The waiter came in then bearing a pale, golden-brown *soufflé* standing high in its dish. He flourished it forward for M. Karsky's approval.

"Magnificent!" cried M. Karsky, rubbing his hands. "And my nose tells me that Monsieur Charles has not forgotten the *keirsch*."

Mary knew that the waiter could not avoid seeing the brooch, but his face when she glanced at him was blank.

M. Karsky, as the *soufflé* was brought served, returned to the subject.

"If you do not like the coloured stones, I can of course find you something else. Perhaps a brooch of small pearls. But this is, in my opinion, the perfect brooch for a young girl." He tasted the *soufflé* and said to the waiter, who lingered, "Admirable. Superb! Tell Monsieur Charles he has never done better." And as the waiter bowed and left them he said, turning to Mary: "Taste it, my dear. Tell me what you think of it."

She tasted it and said in all sincerity: "It's wonderful."

The brooch remained on the table, ignored. M. Karsky began to talk again as if there were nothing amiss, and she began to feel reassured. The coffee came, and then liqueurs, and she did not know at what point the waiter left them, not to return. For M. Karsky was still talking, cigar alight, and she was wondering how soon she might say that it was time to go. He

presently put down his cigar and picked up the brooch again, holding it up to the light. "What colours! Lovely! Come, my dear, let me see how it looks pinned into the neck of your dress, just at the point of the V. That will be the perfect place for it. Let me fasten it there."

She felt as a bird under a net must feel, its heart beating wildly, frantic with fear and the longing to escape. She pushed his hands away, dreading the touch of them on her breast.

"No, no, please! I meant what I said. I don't want it. I won't take it."

"My dear child," he said reproachfully, gravely, as he put the brooch back in its case, "do you imagine I would ask you to do anything I thought you shouldn't do? There—I will put it away. You need not look at it again. But between friends—and you know I am your friend—what a storm in a teacup! You mustn't take so seriously what is merely the desire of a friend to show his friendship. When will you learn to laugh? I wish I could teach you to laugh and be happy."

"He's right," she thought. "I don't laugh enough. Now he's made me feel a fool." She said aloud: "Perhaps I'll learn some day. I'm dull and *gauche* and inexperienced. I know it only too well. You oughtn't to trouble yourself about me." She gave him a fleeting smile that had a hint of tears in it and added: "I must go now. Miss Cotter will be waiting for me."

"It's early yet," he said. "She will hardly be back from her *soirée*. Stay a little longer."

"No," she said, "I'm sure I ought to go." She pushed back her chair, but he put an arm quickly behind her, across her shoulders.

"Tell me first that you have enjoyed the evening as much as I have. Tell me you will remember this dinner with me. It would mean so much to me to know that I had given you even a little happiness. Don't shrink from me, my child." He pulled her to him so that her face touched his and she smelt the lavender water he was so fond of using, and the smell recalled some moment of her childhood, something that she could not track down but which brought with it fleetingly a memory of pleasure, of innocent joy. Then both his arms went round her and he drew her up out of her chair pressing her body against his and murmuring, "You are my love, my little love. Don't you know that?"

Her mind was all darkness and confusion. She thought, "It's come to this. I've let it come to this," and there seemed no way of turning back; only acquiescence. He drew her towards the sofa, whispering, "Let us sit here, close to each other. Let me teach you to love me as I love you." She felt his kisses on her hair and cheek and ear, soft, devouring little kisses, and now it all seemed as inevitable, as inescapable as death. In her chaotic mind it was death; not the death she had often wished for but death in another form. To drift into this other death seemed now to be her dark and unhappy fate, and any death that would blot out thought, self-loathing, was to be welcomed.

But in spite of the unaccustomed wine and her sense of being lost, hopelessly lost, some impulse remained alive in her to fight, to combat annihilation in this or any form for a little longer, to struggle back. She now tried to free herself, with faint cries of protest, and as though frantic at having lost the precious submission he had brought about, his hold of her tightened, his hands grew rough and her pretty silk jacket

tore as he tried to strip it off. His hands became desperate, those same hands that had toyed so delicately with the brooch, that had handled beautiful things so lovingly, that had so expressively illustrated a thought or a passing prejudice, that had raised themselves in gay, exaggerated delight at the sight of the *soufflé*, that had touched money with so careless and elegant an air. Those hands were now berserk and filled her with the utmost fear. She broke away from him with all her strength, shamed by her torn dress, appalled that a man could be two men—one a kind friend, the other a marauder, snatched up her bag that had fallen to the floor and darted to the door like a terrified cat, her mind filled with one panic fear, that it might be locked. It was not locked, and she flung it wide open and raced along the corridor and down the stairs; seemed to float down, unconscious of the movement of her feet. Then through the lobby where a few people stood talking and did not look at her, and out into the street. Once there, among lamps and lights and people she trembled so that she ran stumblingly, pushing through the strolling crowds as though a mob of pursuers were behind her. She ran until her breath gave out and she could run no more; then seeing a couple get out of a taxi, she hailed it and got in. And it was there, driving back to the hotel, huddled in a corner, that she made a vow to escape for ever from a creature as futile, as utterly to be despised as Mary Hallam.

Lowell ordered a small dinner to be sent up to his bedroom, then went into the writing-room to see if he could find a copy of *The Times*. There was one dated the day before, and he sat down in a comfort-

able arm-chair by one of the windows and read the leading article, which was a pessimistic one. He thought it not impossible that the streets of Paris might one day be blocked by the litter and rubble of bombed buildings, and as he pictured this, gloom settled round his heart and it seemed to him that the room darkened. He wished he had not read the paper; he wished he had someone to talk to. There was no one in the room except a woman who was sitting at one of the desks writing. She presently finished her letter, collected her belongings and got up. Conscious of her movements, he lowered his paper and they looked at each other. He saw that it was Mrs. Brewster and that she had every intention of speaking to him. Her face already wore a bright, formal look of recognition, a look nicely suited to the circumstances of their meeting. She came nearer, a hand outstretched, and said:

"It's Lowell Pierce, isn't it? I thought I couldn't be mistaken. I nearly spoke to you the other day."

"I was pretty sure you were Mrs. Brewster," he said, "although it's a long time since we met—if we ever did meet. I certainly know you by sight very well."

"Well," she said, with a sort of brittle graciousness, "I couldn't pass by a fellow Bostonian without speaking."

He drew up another chair and they sat down, both pleased by the encounter. (Maudie could say what she liked, he thought, *he* hadn't started it.) She had a large, flat crocodile-skin bag under her arm and carried a letter in her hand. She was very plainly dressed in brown, and her dark hair was streaked with grey and pinned into a small knot at the back of her neck. She was thin, without a curve anywhere, and it flashed through his mind that she might have been a highly

paid, competent and confidential secretary who spent her life in the efficient service of others. But this appearance was deceptive, for she spoke with incisiveness and authority, and was clearly more used to issuing instructions than to receiving them.

"How long have you been in Paris?" she presently asked him.

He told her they had been there nearly a month. She, it appeared, had been there longer.

"My daughter Felicity is studying French drama," she said. "She's very much interested in the Little Theatre movement at home. Of course I let her choose her career. All my daughters, I'm glad to say, decided to have careers of their own. Evelyn, you may remember, was quite successful as a painter until she married. Now she's entirely taken up with a home and a husband."

"You sound disapproving," he said, smiling and wrinkling his high, bare forehead.

"I'm afraid I am," she answered. "Nowadays, remember, marriages are often short-lived affairs, even in Boston. And then, unless the wife has an occupation of some sort, she's apt to rush into a foolish second marriage."

"There may be something in it," he agreed. "All the same, it still seems natural and right to me that a young woman should put her home and husband first."

"Of course," she told him, coldly and brightly. "You take the masculine viewpoint."

"Well," he said, "I don't know. Perhaps I'm just old-fashioned. By the way, is it true that Cathy and Bill are going to part? I've heard rumours."

"I'm afraid it's only too true," she said, "unless they can be persuaded to change their minds." She held up the letter she was fingering and said: "As an old friend I've just written to them, to beg them

to think it over. Why don't you write too? I wish you would."

He shook his head. "I never give advice in these matters unless I'm asked to, and not always then. Bill would only tell me to go to hell, or words to that effect."

"I don't see why you should mind that," she said.

"Well," he said, "I'm fond of old Bill. Besides, I don't know the story. It all happened just after I'd left."

"It's the usual thing," she told him.

"Another man?" He knew better, and she knew he knew better.

"Cathy's not such a fool. Another woman, of course. A girl, just out of college. I'm disgusted with Bill and so is Cathy, but as I keep telling her, if she'll only have patience and refuse to divorce him, it'll all blow over. She says her pride's too hurt."

"I suppose it would be hurt," he said.

"Yes, but she's got the children to consider."

"Children? They're pretty well grown up. Anyway, Frank is."

"Are you taking Bill's side?" she wanted to know.

"I'm not taking anybody's side. I don't know a thing about it. Who is the girl? What's she like?"

"Oh," she said impatiently, "she was a friend of Frank's, believe it or not. As I say, just out of college. Good figure, pretty, and with that appalling frankness young people cultivate nowadays. Frank brought her to dinner one night. Cathy told me she was wearing a short tweed skirt and one of those tight sweaters college girls at home are so fond of. She said that after dinner the girl took Bill away into a corner and talked to him about sex. Then he took her out to lunch a few times, and before he knew where he was he was head over heels in love. She came and told Cathy

that they adored each other and that this was the big thing in her life."

"What did Cathy say?"

"She said it was the big thing in her life too, and had been for twenty-three years. The girl simply said: 'Surely that's long enough, isn't it? It's my turn now.'"

"I can't say I like the sound of her," said Lowell. "She puts me in mind of a one-syllable word beginning with b. Is Cathy really determined to divorce him?"

"She says so. I think it's crazy. That's why I wrote to-night."

"I'm sorry for old Bill," he said. "He always seemed to feel there was something he hadn't had."

"And what about Cathy?" she asked, sharply. "Mightn't she have felt the same?"

He thought, "A feminist; it's written all over her." He said that Cathy had shown no sign of wanting anything.

"Well," she said, "really I don't know what's wrong with people to-day. Marriage is becoming a farce. We might as well have free love and be done with it." And she spoke with a bitter twist of the mouth.

He said with a rueful little laugh: "Can you think of anything that hasn't changed in our lifetime? I can't."

"Birth and death," she said, with tight lips. "That's all." She tapped her finger on the arm of her chair. "What we need is a religious revival. Nothing else will save the world."

"Do you see it coming?" he wanted to know.

"No. I don't see anything coming but war and upheavals."

"Oh, for heaven's sake," he cried, "don't say you think there'll be war."

She turned her narrow face to him.

"Certainly I do. That's why I brought Felicity over. The other girls had been to Europe and she hadn't. I thought it was her last chance."

"Well," he said with a sigh, "that's what I keep telling Maudie. This may be our last trip to Europe, so why spoil it by talking about war?" He caught her look of inquiry. "Maud Cotter, you know. We came over at the same time. She's here in the hotel now."

She looked at him with a new and vivid interest; with a recollecting, personal look.

"I'd quite forgotten," she said, "that you and she were old friends."

He gave a comfortable little laugh and rubbed his knees.

"I can't remember a time when Maudie and I weren't old friends. Our mothers were at the same school. It goes back a long, long way."

She seemed to come closer to him; uncomfortably close, though she hadn't moved.

"Then," she said, "you must know all about her—and a good deal about me."

"About you?" he asked, puzzled, and he took off his glasses and wiped them, looking at her as he did so with his large, near-sighted eyes. "She told me you'd scarcely spoken to each other. It was after I'd said I'd seen you in the lobby."

"That's quite true," she said, and he felt, vaguely, the presence of something dangerous to his happiness. "But if you've known her so long and so well you must know her past history; you must know all about her."

"I don't know just what you're referring to," he managed to say, and then added, almost indignantly, "of course I know all about her."

She gave a cold, unamused little laugh.

"You're being dreadfully discreet, aren't you?" She looked towards the door. "It's time I went to see if Felicity's back yet." But she made no move to go.

He knew that there was something here from which he had been excluded, and was briefly alarmed. And then he told himself that it was just some small matter between two women who didn't like each other, and he could hear himself saying to Maud: "But, Maudie, why didn't you tell me?"

Waiting for him to speak, still looking towards the door, as if undecided whether to go or stay, she said: "I see you do know."

He made an effort then, to carry the thing further; he smiled knowingly, and said as if he were speaking to a child who needed to be both teased and coaxed:

"You tell me what you're referring to and then I'll tell you what I know about it."

She looked round at him then briskly enough and said: "You know quite well I'm referring to the affair between Maud Cotter and my husband. The miracle is that the whole of Boston didn't know. I shall never understand how they managed to keep it so secret."

A wave of pain and nausea spread all through his body, extending itself outwards from his anguished and stricken heart. "Oh, God!" he prayed, in his extremity. "Let me hide what I feel! Let me hide it. Then I'll die if I must." He gripped the arms of his chair, his body as rigid as a block of wood, and then said out of a silence that had seemed to him full of the sound of things falling and crumbling:

"How did you find it out?"

She didn't notice anything; she wasn't even looking

at him now. Her head was bent, her eyes averted. It seemed as if she had been startled by her own words. As if the telling had been involuntary, unexpected.

"My husband told me himself before he died. He'd asked me to look through some of his papers, and I found a letter from her that had gotten among them by mistake. So I asked him about it. If I'd realised he was going to die I wouldn't have said anything. I'd rather not have known. But I didn't realise it then. He told me they'd been lovers for nearly eleven years. He said he'd told her, from the first, that he couldn't marry her. You see we neither of us believed in divorce where there are children." Nervously she moved the toe of her shoe up and down and looked at it, head averted. "It was a love letter, the letter of a woman very much in love. He told me he was equally in love with her." She paused. "Of course," she went on, "I'd never interfered in any way in his life. We went our own ways. I suppose he had a right to do what he liked. But there are some things one can't forgive. An affair with some light woman, yes, perhaps—men being what they are. But this—with a woman like Maud Cotter—and the deceit and secrecy of it all—however, they got away with it most successfully, didn't they?" She gave a bitter little laugh. "Thanks to that old harridan, Madame Montez. She was no better than an old procuress, in my opinion."

Lowell's hands still gripped the arms of his chair. He dared not relax a muscle. He had so often discussed his heart with specialists that he knew what was going on there; what caused the agony that brought the sweat out all over his poor body. It was almost as if he could see its struggles.

"She was a good singer," he managed to say.

"Possibly. That was before my time. Well, it's puzzled a good many people, I imagine, why Maud Cotter was made buyer for my husband's collection. Though I suppose she knows something about pictures. She must have picked up a good deal from him during all those years. Personally, pictures don't interest me at all. Do they interest you?"

"Very much," he said.

The pain was now ebbing, very slightly, and he allowed himself to relax just a little, and with infinite caution.

"Not that Maudie and I always see eye to eye about them," he added.

Not to let this woman know that what she had just told him had poisoned his whole existence became all his aim. To make himself master of the immediate present was all his craving.

"I wonder," she said, "what Maud Cotter's family would think if they knew. I always admired Mrs. Cotter. By the way, I've never spoken of this to a single soul till now. I wouldn't have spoken now except that I saw quite plainly that you knew."

"You don't gain anything by broadcasting these things," he said. "As for Mrs. Cotter, I doubt if the news would upset her as much as you think. In her eyes, Maudie can do no wrong."

"Nor in yours, I gather."

"Oh, well," he said, and the sweat was cold on his forehead. "*Tout comprendre*, you know."

"I wish the Frenchman who coined that phrase had never been born," she retorted acidly.

"Forgive me for saying anything so trite."

"I can forgive the triteness," she told him. "It's the sentiment I object to." She looked towards the

door and said, "I think I saw Felicity just getting into the elevator. I must go."

She got up and he tried to get up too, but she waved him back into his chair. "Please, please don't move. I'm so glad to have seen you and to have had this talk about Bill and Cathy. Do write to Bill. He's only making a fool of himself. An utter fool."

"I'll think about it," he said. "I won't promise."

"Broadmindedness," she said. "It'll be the undoing of us, I'm afraid. No prejudices, no principles at all—that's what it comes to in the end. Well, good night. I shall avoid speaking to Maud Cotter if I can. I'm not as tolerant as you are. I'm sure she'd understand." She went towards the door, half turned, and said, over her shoulder: "Though what does it all matter now?"

He repeated, with stiff lips: "Yes, what does it all matter now?"

He watched her go through the door and out into the lobby, a thin, neat, uncompromising figure; as definite in outline as a knife. Then he leaned back in his chair with a long sigh, slowly relaxed, slowly stretched his legs out in front of him, first one, then the other, and closed his eyes. He had been bereaved in those few moments of what he loved best in the world. Maud's death would have seemed to him a lesser horror. He sat there letting his anguished mind range back, seeking clues. Maudie, Maudie had done this thing to him. All these years he had been seeing her constantly, constantly. Never once had he heard her speak of Martin Brewster; no, never once, so far as he could remember. He had been fooled to the top of his bent. The stupid, meaningless words kept repeating themselves in his brain—"Fooled to the top of my bent, to the top of my bent."

And when he tried to picture Maud with a lover he failed, failed completely. He knew that there must be another Maud, whom he did not know at all. The Maud he knew was always reasonable, companionable; always ready to laugh at herself; full of zest, good humour, always, as he put it to himself, on an even keel. Doing things for her mother, for her brother Bart, for him, for her friends; dependable, open, loyal. When could she have found the time; how could she have contrived this other life for herself? Those singing lessons she took to please her mother, who thought she sang so much better than she did—yes, he could remember now that she made it a habit to practise in the late afternoon. Looking back he could remember how often, when he went to the house at that time, she was not in. "Maudie hasn't come back yet from her practising," Mrs. Cotter would say, and he would wait for her, sitting in the familiar, homely, Victorian drawing-room with its dark red repp curtains, its carved teakwood furniture, its tall brass lamps with gathered silk shades, the ugly oil painting of her father, Dickson Cotter, over the mantelpiece. He would sit there chatting with Mrs. Cotter, or turning over the pages of the latest *Harper's*, or the *Atlantic Monthly*, until she came in. Often, often she must have come back from her lover to find him there waiting for her. "You're looking well, Maudie," he must often have said as she came in out of the dark, out of the biting cold of the Boston winter evenings, or at the end of some warm summer's day. Now those summers, those winters had no validity for him. It was as if a sponge had been passed over them, blurring them, making them unrecognisable. She must have been—how old—when it began? Twenty-five? Twenty-six? Twenty-

seven? He couldn't work it out; his brain refused the mathematics of it. Well, she had fooled him to the top of his bent.

And no one had suspected. That was the frightening thing. The frightening thing was that she'd never changed, that no one had detected the least difference in her. Not he, not her mother, not Bart, nor any of her many friends. Yes, that was the frightening thing: And then, after years of intimacy with him, her lover had died, and again no one had noticed the smallest change in her. That, too, was frightening. She'd never stopped being in love with Martin Brewster; he knew that. Maudie wouldn't stop. She was the most consistent woman he'd ever known. Then consistently deceitful, consistently false. Oh, Maudie, Maudie!

"I can't see her again," he said to himself, rocking his body from side to side. "I can't speak to her again. I don't ever want to lay eyes on her again. Every hour of every day during all these years she's deceived me. She's let me think what wasn't true. She's let me say—oh, God! how many times?—'Maudie, I blame myself for your never having married.' Only as recently as the day before yesterday she'd let him say it. The words seemed to fly back at him and strike him a blow just above his labouring heart, and he put his hands over it to protect it and bowed his head.

A boy came into the room. He was an English boy dressed in a grey flannel suit with long trousers. He went from one desk to another, opening and shutting the drawers. At last he turned to Lowell and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me where they keep the writing paper? I've never been in a French hotel before."

"Ask at the desk," Lowell managed to say. The

boy looked more closely at him, startled by the note of anguish, and opened his mouth to say something more, but Lowell waved an impatient hand towards the hall and said harshly: "Out there." The boy turned and went out with a backward glance over his shoulder, and did not come back.

After a while, Lowell drew his feet under him and slowly and shakily got out of his chair and went to the lift, walking like an old man, one hand pressed against his side. Up in his room, he locked the door and poured some medicine into a glass and drank it. Then, very slowly, he got into bed. He wished he might never have to leave it again.

Mary lay awake all night, keeping her reading lamp on because the light made her visions less monstrous. In the morning when the hotel began to stir and the lifts to travel up and down, she got up and dressed herself. Now that daylight had come, she thought she would go to Maud, tell her something of the events of the night before, and confess that she had made a solemn vow to kill herself. She had reached a point when she felt she must shift her burden on to the shoulders of the kindest woman she knew, and, having made up her mind to die, leave it to her to dissuade her from it if she could. She did not reason this out; it was an impulse that was stronger than any other impulse at the moment. If Maud could not convince her that life was not utterly hateful and she herself not utterly despicable, then no one could. There had now returned to haunt her all the sexual crimes and horrors she had read about in newspapers and tried to push out of her mind because she did not know how to accommodate them there. Her life and education had

provided her with no mental system of filing by which they could be harmlessly, and even perhaps usefully, dealt with. They now emerged from dark and forgotten corners and convinced her that an evil world but lightly covered over underlay the whole of existence, and that she was fated to meet it wherever she looked for and hoped to find its opposite. She was now running to Maud as a badly frightened child runs to its mother. She knew Maud never got up until half-past eight, and that it was now only seven, but she could not wait. She had to unburden herself of her load of misery, and if it involved telling the truth about Letty and Ferdinand Walsh, well, she would tell that too.

The interior of the hotel was designed in an unusual way. The corridors ran around an open oval court, and one could walk to a room on the opposite side of the building and return without retracing one's steps. Maud's room was exactly opposite, and overlooked the street. Mary, driven by her desperate need, ran with light feet and knocked on Maud's door. There was no reply. She knocked more loudly, and still there was no reply. She knew that Maud did not sleep very heavily because she had waked her before. She could not be in her room. Puzzled, she continued along the corridor, approaching her own room from the other direction, this time passing Lowell's door. From behind it she could distinctly hear voices—Maud's and Lowell's. She paused, wondering if Lowell could have been taken ill. Her own problems still uppermost in her mind she went nearer, and with no thought of eavesdropping, listened. The corridor was empty and silent, and the two inside the room were speaking as people will when they are so absorbed in their own emotions that they do not care whether they can be overheard or not.

To her utter amazement, Maud was crying; there could be no mistake about it; she was crying, arguing, protesting all at once. But she was constantly interrupted by Lowell's voice, so unlike his usual voice that it was hard to believe it was his; harsh, toneless, re-iterative. Mary stood there, shocked and frightened into complete immobility. Lowell was accusing Maud of deceiving him, of having a lover, of having ruined his life and his happiness. "You deceived me," he kept saying, and Maud would break in with: "But Lowell, this concerned only me and him; how could I tell anyone? How could I?" And relentlessly he would talk her down in harsh, level, monotonous tones: "You deceived me, you deceived me." Once Maud broke in with, "If you go, I'll go with you," and Lowell replied harshly: "I don't want you. You deceived me. I'm going home alone." Then Maud: "No, I'll go with you. We can send Mary back to London. I'll go with you." Then Lowell: "I don't want you. I never want to see you again."

Mary pressed the back of her hand against her mouth. Her face looked stricken. She turned slowly away from the door and went to her own room. For a long time she stood in the middle of it, staring in front of her, then she turned to her bureau, pulled out the contents of the drawers and threw everything on the bed. She flung clothes and books into her suit-cases, and when there was nothing more to go in, she took up the telephone and asked for the porter, saying she was leaving at once. She was now terrified that someone, perhaps Maud herself, would come to her room. Her one longing was to get away, to make her escape, and while she waited for the porter, she took up her pen and scribbled a note to Maud.

"Dear Maud,

"Thank you for all the kindness you have shown me. You know I have been unhappy, and in spite of these pleasant weeks with you and Lowell things have got worse rather than better. I have made up my mind never to go back to Letty and my father. I am going to a small town somewhere in France, and I will find work to do. I could teach English or music or take a job as companion. I have twenty-five pounds left and that will keep me until I find something. Please don't worry about me and tell Father not to worry. I will probably write to him later. I only want to be left to myself. If they try to find me I won't promise not to do something desperate. My grateful thanks to you and Lowell.

"Mary."

She took this down with her and gave it to the clerk at the desk, asking at the same time for a taxi and for her bill. She said she was obliged to go away suddenly and that if she decided to return, Miss Cotter would let them know. On the desk were some folders advertising seaside and other resorts, and while the clerk was making out her bill she looked at one entitled, "La Belle Bretagne." It contained a map of the Brittany Coast and she selected at random a small place named Callac le Petit. She knew which station she would have to go from, and she decided to take the first train to St. Malo and make her way from there. No one could stop her now; no one. For the first time she was in control of her own destiny. In this certainty and in no other did she find comfort.

5

THE Hotel des Dunes on the outskirts of Callac le Petit and at the very end of the promenade, had few English visitors. Its sanitation was crude and malodorous, the water in its one bath-tub ran out even more slowly than it ran in, and the zinc showed through the enamel. The tables in the dining-room were served by a single derelict old waiter with the assistance, when the hotel was full, of the perpetually angry proprietress, Madame Lepage and her enormously fat daughter. The sitting-room lacked a single comfortable chair or sofa and smelt of the tomb, and the mattresses were hollowed out by the bodies of two generations of visitors. It was separated from the sea and the beach only by the broken, sagging end of the promenade, and bathers had to cross this with caution, taking care not to get splinters in their feet. The wet footprints, the drippings from the bathing suits and the perpetual sand had soured Madame Lepage's whole outlook on life, but the fact that she permitted bathing from the hotel was the secret of its popularity. The inclusive terms were from thirty-five to fifty-five francs per day, and the room occupied by Mary Hallam, the English girl who had so nearly been drowned, was thirty-five.

This accident, which might easily have been fatal, was the talk of the hotel for days. Everyone had commented unfavourably on the folly and recklessness of the young woman whose habit it had been to bathe, quite alone, from a lonely part of the beach some

distance from the hotel. That she had not lost her life on this occasion was no fault of her own. It had chanced that a young couple from the town, newly engaged, had been increasing their knowledge of each other behind a sand-dune that morning. Peering over the top of it unseen, they had watched the young English girl drop her raincoat on the beach and, wearing a bright blue bathing suit and a white cap, wade out until she reached deep water, swim perhaps thirty strokes and then disappear.

The young man, a baker, was an exceptionally good swimmer and had won a medal for rescuing a child who had fallen from the breakwater into the little harbour. Pulling off his sand shoes he raced away from the hollow in the dunes and from his fiancée, and struck out for the place where he had last seen the white cap. The girl was well below the surface when he found her, and was unconscious. She was easy to bring in because she was light and did not struggle. The baker's fiancée ran down to the water's edge and together they laid the limp body face downward on the sand and worked to restore respiration by the most modern methods, the young man straddling the body in a kneeling position and exerting rhythmical pressure on the back and ribs. For a long time there was no sign of returning life, and the fiancée burst into tears and cries. But he persisted and at last his efforts were rewarded; the water was pressed out of the lungs and the breath drawn into them. When they were sure that breathing was restored, they carried her to the nearest house, which was the Hotel des Dunes and were relieved to find that she was living there. Madame Lepage at once sent for the doctor.

A choleric woman at the best of times, the incident

angered her to the point of frenzy. The girl was a fool; she was mad. She had no right to cause everyone such trouble and inconvenience. She must assuredly, she told the young rescuers, be made to pay a handsome reward. The whole place was in a delicious state of excitement and confusion, but the girl herself lay with closed eyes, exhausted and speechless. When she presently vomited more sea water she opened her eyes, looked at the people crowding round her bed with a look of the utmost forlornness, and closed them again.

The doctor said her condition was undoubtedly serious. The pulse was alarmingly faint. He prescribed spoonfuls of brandy and milk at frequent intervals, and said he would call again in the afternoon. When he did so, there was little change.

He came again the next day and found her very slightly better though still in a semi-coma. Her pulse was stronger, but she could not be made to utter a word. The doctor, a sympathetic and serious man, was worried. Had she no friends, no relations? Had no letters come for her? Had she had no visitors? The answer to every question was no, none. Were there no English in the hotel to whom she might be induced to speak? Madame Lepage said there were none at all; she did not cater for English visitors who were almost invariably troublesome. There was, however, a young Englishman arriving in two days for a brief stay. He had been there once before, some years ago, and she knew nothing of him except that he had behaved well and paid his bill. He had asked for space in the garage in which to keep a motor cycle. She added that if the young woman did not recover within the next day or so she would have to insist on her

being removed to a hospital, as both she and her daughter were being run off their feet.

The doctor urged her to be patient and continued his daily visits. On the day of the young Englishman's expected arrival he called late in the afternoon, hoping to find him there. He saw a figure in dirty khaki shorts squatting beside a dust-covered motor cycle in the shade of the hotel. He had an oil can and an oily rag in his hands. The doctor concluded he would be there for some time, and went in to see his patient. When he came out again the young man was still at work, and for a few minutes he stood watching him. The doctor disliked machines and hated his cranky old Citroën, but he observed the utter absorption of the young man with indulgence and approval. A person who is serious about one thing is apt to be serious about another. He approached, coughed, and said :

"Pardon, monsieur, I think you are English."

The young man looked over his shoulder with a pair of slightly bloodshot blue eyes, and then stood upright. "I am English," he said and then added defensively, as he saw that the stranger wished to talk to him : "I speak French very little."

Instead of bursting into rapid talk at the sound of a few words in his own language, the doctor pointed to himself and said, very slowly and clearly : "I am doctor. Doctor."

The young man nodded and waited.

"In the hotel," and he pointed towards the annexe, "young English lady, ill, you understand ? Ill."

"Ill. Yes, I understand."

"Alone. Quite alone."

"Alone. Yes."

Painstakingly, determined to make himself clearly

understood, the doctor proceeded. His listener nodded, and from time to time repeated his words after him.

"Then," the doctor said, after some minutes of this, "you will see her?"

The young man seemed to commune with himself, as though he were putting to himself a series of questions. What was involved? What would the result be? Was it at all certain that he could help? At last he said, "Yes. When?"

"This afternoon, to-morrow, when you please. But soon."

The young man indicated his motor cycle. "After," he said. Then he held up two dirty hands. "After," he said again. And then he asked: "The name?"

"Mees Allom," the doctor answered, mouthing the words with great distinctness. "Mees Mary Allom."

"Allom," the young man repeated. "O.K. Soon."

Handshaking being out of the question, the doctor smiled his satisfaction. "I come to-morrow," he said. "I look for you. Ten o'clock."

The young Englishman indicated that he would be somewhere about, and the doctor went to the little side road where he had left his car and drove away. The young man returned to his work. He did not hurry. He cleaned and oiled the machine with thoroughness, wheeled it away into the garage around at the side and padlocked it. Then he went into the hotel to wash and change. Half an hour later he was looking for Madame Lepage, but was told by the old head waiter that she had gone to the town. The young man took him by the arm and said loudly, as he was a little deaf, "English lady, Miss Allom. Which room?"

Without replying the waiter shuffled away and he followed him upstairs and along a creaking, flimsily-

built passage to the annexe. He knocked on a door and a faint voice called out "*Entrez.*" He opened the door. It opened directly on the small iron bed in which Mary was lying, a blue bedjacket she had not had the time or the strength to put her arms into, about her shoulders. At the sight of a stranger, fear leapt into her eyes and she lay tense, with half-raised head. "Who is it?" she cried.

The waiter looked from one to the other, moved his shoulders and went off down the corridor again, his responsibility at an end. The young man stood in the doorway and the two stared at each other with un-winking intentness. Then he spoke:

"You don't know me and I don't know you, but the doctor asked me to come. It seems I'm the only other English person in the hotel. If you don't want to see me, say so, and I'll go."

The fear faded slowly from her face. She moistened her dry lips and asked: "Why did he want you to come?"

"Oh, just to see if I could be of any help. He said you'd been ill."

He came no further into the room. It seemed as if he dreaded crossing the sill; he hung back, disliking his errand. She noticed his angry sunburn and look of health and the hint of sullenness in his level regard, like that of a child who does a gracious act unwillingly. Her fear receded. He had not come to hunt her out; he was just an ordinary, decent young man on a holiday, doing what he had been asked to do. All this was vague in her forlorn mind, not put into words, only felt.

"You look pretty ill," he said, leaning against the door-frame.

She looked away. Her hands lay limply on either side of her body.

"Well," he said, a little impatient, "am I to stop or go away?"

She turned her head towards him again. "You can come in," she said, and added, "if you like. There's only one chair."

It was the chair the doctor had been sitting in, and was close beside the bed. He drew it back a little and sat on the edge of it, his hands on his bare knees.

"I'd better tell you my name, I suppose." As she said nothing he went on, with an effort, "I'm Alan Garstin. I came from Havre on my motor bike, all along the coast of Normandy and Brittany."

"Yes," she said, and looked at him as if to ask what this had to do with her.

He went on: "The doctor said your name was Allom. Is that right?"

With the faintest of smiles she corrected him. "It's Hallam. They have trouble with the 'h'." Her voice was little more than a whisper.

"Well," he said, "I have trouble with the whole language. Are you on a holiday?"

"I suppose you might call it that." She averted her face and he could see only a profile that might have belonged to a girl of seventeen or so, but that was probably because she was in bed, he thought, with her hair not done.

"The doctor said you'd had some sort of accident."

"I nearly drowned."

"How did that happen?"

Faintly she said: "I wanted it to happen."

He sat up straighter and looked at her with a sharper interest.

"You had a pretty good nerve, didn't you?"

"Why do you say that?"

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

"It takes a bit of doing, I should think. If I thought I was better dead—and that's most unlikely—I'd shoot myself."

"I hadn't a revolver," she said.

"I suppose not. What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know."

"Going to try again?"

"If I tried it again here they'd know it was suicide. I meant it to look like an accident."

Her tired, listless voice made his voice seem rough, loud, by comparison.

"I suppose you could go and do it somewhere else," he said. "There are plenty of other places."

"I've got to decide that," she told him, "between now and Sunday. My money will only last till Sunday or Monday. I can't even pay the doctor."

"Why can't you get more? You look like a daughter of the rich to me."

The out-of-date phrase almost made her smile.

"Why do I?"

"You're not a working girl. Not with those hands. And you don't talk like one. You've had an expensive education. You speak French. Wouldn't they send you money if you asked for some?"

"I expect they would," she said, in an exhausted voice, "but I won't ask."

"Rather die?"

"Much rather. It's the only thing I do want."

There was a silence, and then he asked:

"Not going to have a baby, are you?"

Her eyes flew wide open and he saw the whites around the dark pupils. She was shocked, dismayed, distressed. She flung back at him with more strength than she had yet shown an outraged "No!"

"All right," he said, "all right. There's nothing to get excited about. The doctor asked you, didn't he? Or didn't you tell him what you told me?"

Mutely she shook her head and averted her eyes. She had retreated far from him into an anguished silence. They hadn't talked much about such things where she was brought up, he surmised, and felt a contempt for "them" and for her. Didn't she know such things happened? Didn't she know it would be anybody's first guess? What was the matter with her? Where had she been all her life?

"All right," he said again. "I suppose you didn't tell him. Well, I just wanted to know. You've admitted to me that you tried to commit suicide. I don't know what the laws of this country are, but at home, if I told the police, they'd charge you with attempting to commit a crime. Now it's no crime to have a baby."

She lay very still, eyes averted, then she looked at him and said:

"If it hadn't been for that man behind the sand dune it would have been all over now. I don't see why I should be punished because someone interfered. I knew what I was doing. I wanted to die. But go and tell the police, if you like. Nothing matters now."

"A-month or two in the lock-up might teach you to value what you've got," he told her.

"I haven't got anything," she answered.

He shifted in his chair, looked out of the window and then back at her again.

"We're getting nowhere fast, aren't we?" he said. "Why don't you ask me about myself? Isn't that what well-brought-up girls are supposed to do?"

"You'd better go now," she said, and closed her eyes.

"Well if you won't ask," he said, "I'll tell you:

I'm an electrical engineer. I was born in Yorkshire, but we came South when I was a kid. We live in Wiltshire."

She said, not opening her eyes: "You and your wife?"

"I'm not married. No time for that. I'm only twenty-four."

"How did you happen to come here?" she asked.

"I was here six years ago," he told her, "with another chap. On push bikes that time. It was a bit cleaner then. How did you happen to come?"

"I looked for a small place by the sea on a map of Brittany, and I saw this."

He bent over in a sudden laugh.

"That's funny," he said, and laughed again.

"What's funny?"

"You, looking for a place to drown yourself from. Choosing it on a map."

There was no answering smile on her face. She said, wearily:

"Hadn't you better go now?"

"All right," he said, and got up at once. "I'll come along to-morrow, if you like, after the doctor's seen you. And look," he added, "don't worry. I'm used to other people's troubles, and I've had a few of my own. Just remember I'm here in the hotel if you feel lonely or want anything."

She nodded and he went out, closing the door behind him. As he went away down the creaking corridor, he thought: "Well, anyway, she'll have something else to think about for a bit, besides herself."

When the doctor came the next morning he found his patient better, though still unresponsive and unwilling to talk. But just as he was about to leave, she said:

"Dr. Bertrand, please don't come any more. You've been very kind, but I've no money to pay you."

He looked at her and smiled.

"I had no intention, mademoiselle, of sending you a bill. It was an accident, and when one is on holiday, one does not make preparations in advance for the payment of doctor's bills. I understand also that you are not well off, as you occupy the cheapest room in a cheap hotel. Mademoiselle, my reward will be to see you well again. Try to give me that pleasure." He took and patted her hand. "I will come again to-morrow, and after I have been here, you may perhaps get up. We will see."

Tears came into her eyes. "I don't know how to thank you."

"I have told you," he said. "Get well."

As he was about to close the door she called him back.

"I forgot to tell you," she said, "that I can't sleep. Will you give me something; some sleeping tablets? I haven't any."

He looked at her for a moment without replying. Then he opened his case, took out a single tablet and placed it on the table by her bed.

"Take this, the last thing at night. To-morrow you can tell me if it helped you to sleep."

Her eyes followed his movements anxiously. "Only one?"

"Only one. That will be sufficient."

Outside the hotel he looked about him and saw Garstin coming in from a bathe, a towel about his shoulders. He noted his sturdy build, the self-assured way in which he carried himself, the delicate Saxon skin already angrily sunburned on shoulders, shins,

arms and knees. He called out to him and went to meet him, and they stood together on the decaying little promenade.

"The young lady is better," said the doctor, slowly and carefully. "You understand? Much better. Please see her again to-day. Yes? You understand? Talk to her again."

Garstin nodded. "Yes," he said. "Soon." He glanced about to be sure no one was within earshot and then said: "Accident?"

"Perhaps," said the doctor sadly, and frowned at his shoes. Then he raised his eyes to Garstin's. "No," he said. "Not an accident, perhaps. But she tells me nothing. She needs a friend," he said, and pointed a finger at Garstin's chest. "A friend. You."

"Yes," Garstin said. "Perhaps."

The doctor said: "I know."

They parted and Garstin went to his room to dress. Twenty minutes later he was knocking at Mary's door. She knew who it was, for she called out, "Come in." She had tidied herself, done her hair and put on the blue silk bed jacket.

"You look a lot better," he told her.

"The doctor wants me to get up to-morrow," she said. "What is there to get up for?"

"You can lie on the beach in the sun."

She gave a broken little laugh. "And then what?"

"Well," he said, "it'll be better than lying here looking at those clothes lines and the back of the garage, won't it?"

She made no answer.

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said, "if you like."

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This time he did not draw the chair back, but sat where the doctor had been sitting.

"Are you going to write home?"

"No," she said.

"Then what?"

She was silent.

"Well," he said, "you don't make sense, to me. What are you running away from?"

"Myself."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Everything," she said.

He looked at her coolly, critically.

"I can't see that myself. You're young and you wouldn't be bad-looking if you'd put on some fat. You've got some brains too, I suppose."

"I haven't got health."

"Plenty of others in the same boat."

"It isn't a boat I want to spend my life in."

"What's wrong?"

"I'm always getting ill. Bronchitis or pneumonia or 'flu. I've got a weak lung. It's better now, but I had to spend two years in Switzerland."

"Who paid for that?"

"My father."

"What a brute!"

She said quickly, and with some warmth:

"I never said he was a brute. He always meant to be kind."

"Well," he said, "go on."

"Oh, I get headaches that drive me nearly mad, and I faint, and I'm just no good." She held up her right hand, looked at it and dropped it again.

"What happened to that?" he asked.

She told him and he said, "That's too bad."

"When I first came here," she said, "I thought I'd give myself another chance. I got a job taking care of some French children. Their mother had fallen off a bicycle and broken her ankle, and she was glad of my help. They weren't bad children but they were too much for me, and after a month of it I had to give up. I wasn't strong enough. After that I couldn't find anything to do at all, and my money was coming to an end. So I . . . well, you know the rest."

"You'd better get back to England," he said. "There's going to be a war."

"I haven't read the papers," she told him. "But if that's true, it's just another reason for getting out of this world."

"Now listen to me," he said. "As I see it, you've got three courses open to you. You can write to your father for money, you can have another try at drowning yourself, or you can come back to England with me on the back of the motor bike. Which is it to be?"

He sat forward on the edge of the chair, his hands on his knees, looking intently at her from under his thick, fair eyebrows. She saw that she would have to take one of these courses and take it soon. She wondered how far he would try to stop her if she decided on the second course. And she wondered which of the three courses he would choose for her himself. The first, naturally. But that one was out of the question. After a pause she said:

"I'll decide between now and Saturday."

"No," he told her, "you'll decide now. And I want to tell you this. If you come back to England I can give you a job. It's respectable and it'll mean three meals a day and a roof over your head. It might turn out to be too tough for you, but at least you could give it a try."

"I'd like to know more about it," she said.

His face took on a look of stubborn, even sullen reserve. It was as if a lid had been dropped.

"If you don't feel you can trust me, you'd better choose one of the other two, I don't care which. My advice to you is to write to your father, like a sensible girl."

"No," she said, "I won't do that."

"Well, what about coming to England with me and taking that job?"

She gave a weary sigh. "All right. I'll come with you."

He frowned, looked out of the window and then back at her again.

"Unless you set yourself up as a pretty good judge of character and feel you can trust me, you're a fool to say you'll come."

"Yes," she said, listlessly. "I am a fool, I know it. But I do trust you."

He gave a sudden laugh and she said, "I didn't mean it quite the way it sounded. I do trust you, and I don't know why you bother about me."

Tears came into her eyes and he said, quickly:

"I'll tell you this much. You'll be helping me out of a tight spot if you take that job. If there's a war, I want to join up if they'll let me. They tell me I'm in a reserved occupation, but we'll see about that. It's the only war I ever thought was worth fighting in."

With a puzzled look she said, "Then you want me to look after your house or whatever it is while you're away?"

"That's part of it. Can you cook?"

"No."

"Do housework?"

"I've never done any."

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

"Is that the way girls like you are brought up?"

"I told you," she said, "I intended to be a pianist."

"Can't you make beds and play the piano?"

She was silent.

"All right," he said, "we won't argue the point. I suppose you can learn." He was silent for a moment, staring at the floor. Then he raised his head and said, "No, I'm not being fair. You said you trusted me, and I'll have to trust you. I'll have to tell you a few facts, and then you can make up your mind. If you want to back out, you can back out." He clasped his hands together and fixed his eyes on them. She wanted to hear what he had to say and at the same time felt that it was going to be hard for him to say it, and that perhaps she ought not to be hearing it. She wished that she could go back to England with him without being in any way involved in his life. But she knew she was in no position to bargain with him or to impose conditions.

Suddenly, out of the silence, he spoke.

"My father killed a man," he said, looking at his clasped hands. "He killed him in anger and in hot blood. Never mind why. He spent six years in gaol and died there. My mother loved him. We both loved him. He went to prison about the time my kid brother was born. After that she began to do and say queer things. They did what they could for her but she's never going to get any better. That's why we left Yorkshire and came South, because of my father and all. My mother and my kid brother live with me. I won't let them send her to a home. We live in the country and I go to work every day on my motor bike. My brother goes to school. There's an old woman who looks after the house and my mother, but she's got

arthritis so badly she can't work any more. She's only staying on till I get back. My mother wouldn't hurt a fly. She just lives in a world of her own, and imagines what she wants to imagine. I never let her go near a shop because sometimes she takes a fancy to things. It's a small house, five rooms and a garden. My kid brother helps with the housework before he goes to school and after he comes home. He wants to be a teacher. We haven't got any neighbours, except a farmer or two. The nearest village is two miles."

She did not know what to say. She could only think, "How terrible!" but she couldn't say it. She looked out of the window, at the back of the garage and some clothes on the line that were spreading and struggling clownishly in the breeze from the sea. A dog chained in the yard whimpered. Then her hand went up to her cheek in a nervous gesture and she said:

"But I'm frightened of people who aren't sane."

He got up. "Well, that's that. I've told you she wouldn't hurt a fly and it's true, but if you're afraid, it's no good." He went to the door. "You're a funny soul, aren't you? Not afraid to drown yourself, but afraid of a woman who makes up stories for herself and forgets who she is. I'll be going for a swim now."

"Wait a minute," she pleaded, and there was a note of dread in her voice. "Does that mean you don't want to take me back to England with you?"

Casually he answered, "Oh, I'll take you if you want to go. But what'll you do when you get there?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Well," he said, "I'll be leaving here on Monday next."

He was already out of the door when she called him back.

"Mr. Garstin!"

"My name's Alan."

He saw her look of embarrassment and knew that she was incapable of using his Christian name until her own time.

"I just wanted to say," she told him, making a visible effort, "that I've changed my mind."

"Going to write to your father?"

"No, I'll go to your home."

"All right. If you can't stick it, well, you can't."

"Thank you," she said.

The next day she walked a little on the promenade. The weather had changed and it was too cold to sit on the beach. She tried not to mind being an object of special interest to the other people in the hotel who crowded round her when she first appeared congratulating her on her recovery. She thought it strange that the mere possession of life, the mere fact of being alive should in itself be thought such a blessed thing. She was glad when Garstin came out and took her down to the promenade where she walked unsteadily, her arm through his.

"They're all watching us," she said, embarrassed.

"What's it matter?" he asked. "You'll never see any of them again."

The next day she went for a short ride on the back of his motor cycle. She got on with some reluctance, picturing in her mind the ugly straddle of hundreds of young women she had seen tearing along the English roads. Once on, however, she was comfortable enough.

"Hold on to me," he said, "and if you get tired, say so."

They went inland and stopped at a restaurant he remembered for a cup of tea.

"I like this country," he said. "It suits me, somehow. I like wine, even their cheap stuff, and I like their cafés. It's all friendlier than with us. I never go into a pub at home. When I finish work I go home. If I want a drink I can get it there."

"Don't you lead a rather lonely life?" she asked.

"Maybe I do," he said, and was silent, and again it was as if a lid had been dropped.

Presently he said, "About your going back with me. There's something I want to say." He ran his fingers through his thick hair and without looking at her asked, "Are you one of those girls who think every man is after them?"

She gave a little start and cried, "Good heavens, no! I never think anyone . . . I mean I'm very far from being like that."

"Because," he said, "going back together we'll be staying at the same inns and all. I just want you to know that as far as I'm concerned you might be my sister. There's nothing wrong with you, mind, but that's how I feel about you."

She said, in a low voice, "I'm very glad."

"Well," he said, "that's all I wanted to say about that."

The next day she was lying on her bed resting when Madame Lepage came up to tell her that her rescuer, the baker, Jean Fourneaux, had called to see her. She got up at once and went down to the sitting room that was never aired and smelt of the tomb. Her visitor had dressed himself for a ceremonial visit, and was wearing a black suit and a tie of salmon pink. He looked immensely strong, with a bull-like neck and glossy red cheeks. She felt suddenly ashamed because she had made no effort to thank him or to find out where he

lived. She had not been grateful and she had not thought or acted as a grateful person would act. Now she shook his hand warmly and forced herself to make a little speech.

"I can never tell you," she said, "how grateful I am to you for saving my life. I don't know how to thank you." Quickly she took off her gold wrist watch and put it into his hand. "Please," she said, "take this and give it to your fiancée. I shall never forget, and some day, perhaps, I can thank you as you ought to be thanked."

He protested that he wanted no reward, but she saw that he was very ready to take the watch and when she insisted he put it into his pocket with many expressions of gratitude.

"I came," he said, "only to ask after mademoiselle's health. The English gentleman, her friend, has already been to see me, and has been most generous. Mademoiselle is also generous. It is sufficient reward to see her well again."

When he had gone she looked for Garstin and presently saw him just coming in from a bathe. She went down to the beach to meet him.

She said at once, looking distressed, "Jean Fourneaux has just been here. He told me what you did. You oughtn't to have done it."

"Somebody had to do something," he said, wiping his face with his towel. "He saved your life, didn't he?"

"How much did you give him?" she demanded.

"Never you mind," he answered and walked on towards the hotel.

"But how am I going to repay you?"

"You'll repay me all right."

"But can you afford it?" she persisted, following him.

"I'll get by. Don't you worry."

She noticed that where his skin was not sunburned it was as fine and as white as a child's. The strong wind blew along the beach, blowing the sand against her bare legs, fluttering her hair and skirts, blowing life into her. She looked at her left wrist from which the watch had gone and saw the pale mark where it had been. It had been a present from her father, and had meant little either to him or to her. He had told Mademoiselle Drieux to choose it, and now it had rewarded a man for saving a life that she had tried to throw away.

Later that day Garstin asked her if she thought anyone was looking for her. She said she didn't know. He remarked that it ought to be easy to trace anyone; visitors to France were always signing their names. Perhaps they weren't looking for her at all. Perhaps they weren't, she agreed, and added that she had begged them not to.

"Suppose they do come here after you've gone," he said. "Do you want them to know that you left the hotel on the back of a motor bike?"

"I don't care if they do know," she said.

"All right," he said. "I just wondered."

He told her she could only take with her what she would need on the journey. He had an extra knapsack she could have. As for the rest of her things, it would be safest, he thought, to make several parcels of them and send them by post. "There are all those books I saw in your room," he said. "Send those by post, too."

"I can't send them to your home, can I?" she asked.

"Send them to the post office at Burley. We'll pick them up later."

"I'm costing you a lot of money," she said, unhappily.

"I'll get by," he said.

Madame Lepage was not sorry that she was leaving. She had caused endless trouble by being so nearly drowned, and she lacked the sole virtue of most English visitors in that she tipped like a French person. She was now suspicious of her morals as well. She would be glad to see the last of her. She was somewhat mollified when Mary gave her two suitcases, which she said she was in any case leaving behind.

On the day of departure, Monday, Mary put on her tweed coat over a cotton dress, and her red beret. She was sitting waiting in front of the hotel when Garstin came out. "Ready?" he said. "Come down to the beach. We needn't start for ten minutes or so."

They walked along the sand in silence. The tide was coming in and the sea had ultramarine blue and jade green streaks in it, and the small waves were laced with foam. The coarse grass among the dunes was vivid in the morning sun.

"Where was it?" he asked, suddenly.

She knew at once what he meant. "I don't want to take you there," she said.

"We've got time. Where was it?"

She gave him a pleading look which he ignored.

"Show me," he said.

They walked on down the beach and at last she stopped and said, "It was here. He was behind that little sandhill where the driftwood is."

He went forward and picked up a piece of the wood; it was dry, and grey and shaped like a shinbone. He stooped over a smooth patch of sand and she saw that he was making letters. He spelt out her name, Mary Hallam, and then his own, Alan Garstin. He worked silently, seriously, forming the letters with care.

"There we are," he said, and straightened himself.

She felt the blood rush to her cheeks.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"Just a fancy I had."

"The tide will wash it out soon," she told him.

He stared at the printing in the sand.

"I like seeing them there," he said. "It ought to mean something here, in this place. It's something I'll remember."

"I'll remember, too," she said in a low voice.

"When I was a kid of eighteen," he said, "I wanted to do that, here on this same beach. I thought, 'All this sand and not a name to write in it but my own.'"

He tossed the stick away. "We'll leave them there for the tide to smooth out." He looked at his wrist watch. "Time we were starting, I suppose. The end of my holiday."

They said no more, but walked back to the hotel. As they walked she was thinking, "Why? Why did he do that? What did he mean me to understand by it?"

When they were nearly at the hotel he touched her arm and said: "Look back."

They both paused and turned, and she could just see the little sandhill where he had picked up the piece of driftwood. It was going to be, presently, a warm day. The long, gently curving beach raced away from them and became a yellow sickle ending in a bluish cape dotted with tiny houses. Small soft clouds patterned the sky, moving lazily, and each wavelet hissed as it drew back down the shelving beach, and rushed up again with a miniature bustle and flurry and spread itself in lovely curves a little higher and a little higher.

"I'll remember it," she said, and tried to smile, and her lips trembled a little.

"You'll remember it all right," he told her.

He wheeled the motor cycle out of the shed and strapped on their knapsacks. His movements were deliberate and unhurried, and there was something boyish in his absorption as he worked. She could picture him as a boy, very serious, perhaps made to feel important by events and responsibilities, and holding himself and looking as if he were important. It was in his face, in his walk, in his back, in the way he carried himself. It touched her and at the same time made her want to smile. He gave her the impression of knowing very well what he was about, of taking always the long-range rather than the short-range view, and taking it after inner deliberation. He would not be a person, she felt sure, to ask or take advice. He would consult only himself.

"Are you ready?" he asked, when she had settled herself behind him.

"Quite ready."

The route he had chosen lay inland and passed through Pontivy and Dinan. He thought that if they reached Dinan the first night they would be doing well, but the noise of the motor cycle and the shaking were too much for her, and forty miles or so before they reached Dinan she confessed that she was too tired to go further. They had had to make a small detour because of work in progress on a bridge, and found themselves in a small town containing a single inn of no pretensions, least of all to cleanliness. She said she didn't care, she was so tired she could sleep anywhere. He praised her and said she had done very well. To-morrow she would do even better.

At the inn she was reminded of Maud's comments at the hotel in Paris, for the proprietor offered them a

double room, saying there was only one single room vacant. After Alan had refused the double room, however, he said there was a small single room over the kitchen where his son slept. The son was accommodating and offered to sleep elsewhere.

"Don't let it worry you," said Alan, "they'll always offer us a double room." He looked to see if her door had a key. It had, and he said: "You'd better lock your door."

"I always do in hotels," she said.

She slept well until dawn, then her eyes flew open and she wondered, in a sudden panic, where she was. After this she lay awake, her brain feverishly busy with her situation, and heard all the sounds of stirring life, and the beginning of a busy day, in summer, at an inn where people rose early and went about their tasks as if the rest of the world were equally awake and occupied. But the sounds fell on her ears agreeably. Life, she thought; why had she been so eager to throw it away? She was like a hurt child who rushes away from its companions at play and hides, and half believes it does not want to be found and comforted. She felt now that a hand had been held out to her, held out because she was an unhappy human being; an impersonal but kind hand. Bitterly aware, in the dawn, of her own cowardice, of her own quick despair, she compared herself and her trouble with Alan Garstin and his trouble, and abased herself.

Lying sleepless on her hard, uneven bed, she knew that if he had not come she would have tried once more to end it all. "What else could I have done?" She thought of the task she had undertaken, and thought that if he were not there it would be many times harder. Perhaps he was wrong; perhaps there would not be

a war. Perhaps he and most of the people they talked to along the route, she interpreting for him, were wrong, and if they were wrong then he would not go away from his home, and her life there would be, perhaps, more bearable, less frightening. But however it turned out, she told herself, she would not let him down. She would do her best, if only her health would let her.

"I ought to sleep," she thought, but she did not know except by guess, what time it was, as she had no watch. He had promised to knock on her door at seven-thirty, and she lay inventing pictures of his home and of her life in it until he came. And once up, she forgot her worries and was absorbed in the coming day.

Sometimes when they saw a particularly fine church they stopped to look at it. Inside he spoke in a hushed whisper, walked softly and by his look made her wonder if he were religious, but she did not like to ask him.

"I wish I knew something about architecture," he said once. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Very little," she admitted. "Only what I picked up at school." She asked him if he read much and he said that he did, that he sat up late at night reading.

"What do you read?" she asked, curious as to his tastes.

"Oh, anything from Shakespeare to Westerns."

"Westerns?"

"Good Lord! Don't you know what they are? Books about the Wild West. Crazy, but I like them."

Along their swift passage they collected villages one after another, like beads on a string for their memories to play with; some old and beautiful, others a straggle of small houses beside the road. Chiefly her impressions were of the odd and elaborately ornamented churches, of dignified people, of black-gowned women wearing, sometimes, the Breton headdress, and of stretches of

wild, strange and lovely country. Frequently he stopped to buy a French newspaper and she translated the main items of news for him. At Dinan, when he stopped at a garage for oil and petrol, she vanished and when he was ready to start he couldn't find her. She presently returned, her arms full of parcels.

"What have you got there?" he asked, staring. "You told me you had no money left."

"I went into a jeweller's and sold a ring," she confessed. "It's all right; it's one I didn't like. My stepmother gave it to me. I spent some of the money on things for lunch. I thought we could have a picnic instead of going to a café." She held up a half bottle of wine. "I bought this, too."

She put it into her knapsack, and the other things were tied on to the machine. She thought she saw an approving look on his face.

"All right," he said, "if it was something you didn't want. Tell me when you see a place where you want to stop and eat."

She thought that for a young man who had no sisters he showed tact and understanding. He had a quick eye for sheltered spots, stopped without being asked, and gave her all the privacy she needed. Never once was she made to feel awkward or embarrassed. They had their lunch in open, rolling country, left the motor cycle by the road where they could keep an eye on it, and climbed a turfy hill from which they could see, for many miles, the country over which they would presently travel, with the road shining and winding, up hill and down. She opened the parcels and brought out long, crisp rolls, fresh butter, lettuce, sausage, sardines, some thinly sliced ham, and some cheese. He opened the bottle of wine and filled the two unbreakable cups.

"Sure you don't mind about that ring?"

"I was glad to see the last of it," she told him.
"Now I'm in funds for a while."

"Was she one of your troubles?" he asked.

She nodded.

"When are you going to tell me the whole story?"

"When you have time to listen," she said. She had taken off her beret, and in the soft, warm wind her hair blew about her face, on which the tan deepened day by day.

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

She broke the rolls, and he asked if she wanted a knife. She told him that French bread should be broken, not cut.

"There's a lot you can teach me," he remarked, and then added, as if he did not want to give her time to answer: "There isn't much you can't do with that hand, is there?"

"I can't do the only thing I want to do."

A few low, distant white farms were the only signs of human life except when, now and again, a car wound up the hill below them and vanished around a bend with a faint moan of gears.

He suddenly rolled over on his stomach and said, eyes and fingers busy in the grass: ∴

"Are you glad or sorry that chap pulled you out?"

She had known he would ask that question; she had been expecting it and, in a way, dreading it, for it would require an unequivocal reply, and such a reply would not be easy to make. But there was such a thing, she told herself, as she hesitated, as gratitude; and that she owed him, whether or not she owed gratitude to Jean Fourneaux. She knew it was not an

expression of gratitude that he was now asking for, but an assurance that things looked better and brighter for her, that her load, whatever it was, had been lightened. And she could not deny him this satisfaction, and did not wish to. She looked at his down-bent head and knew that she not only felt gratitude but affection, and that she was by no means unhappy or unhopeful. She said, gently launching the words from her lips with confidence in them :

“So far, glad.” And added : “Yes, I’m glad.”

He seemed moved by her assurance when it came, for he lay perfectly still as though he listened with all his being. She could not see his face, only his thick, roughened hair and his relaxed, quiet, outstretched body on the grass.

“I believe you mean it,” he said, and stirred and sat up. Then he took up his cup. “This is the first wine we’ve drunk together,” he said. “Let’s have a toast.” He waited for her to take up her cup and then said, raising his : “Here’s to you, Mary Hallam, and here’s hoping you’ll say the same in a year’s time.”

She drank and then let him fill her glass again.

“It’s my turn now,” she said, but when she raised her cup she could think of nothing to say but, “Here’s to you, Alan.” It was the first time she had used his Christian name, and she knew that he was as much aware of it as she was herself.

The sun poured down on their heads and all about them was peace and absolute silence, without even a bird’s note to break it. “He’ll remember this day,” she thought, “when he’s an old man, and I’ll remember it when I’m an old woman.” And the thought of growing old, of her flesh and bones and blood gradually changing and ageing, seemed a luxury beyond her assessing.

"I never thought you'd come with me," he said, "till the last minute. I was afraid you'd change your mind." He rolled over on his stomach again and his hair fell over his forehead. He pushed it back with hard, impatient fingers. "It needs cutting. I've just been thinking; if we go on as we've been going we'll get home day after to-morrow."

At the word "home" her doubts rushed back. "Alan," she said, "how are you going to explain to them about me?"

"I lay awake last night," he said, "puzzling that out. I decided it would save a lot of talk and fuss if we just said we were going to get married."

She felt the blood burn in her cheeks and her heart beat with instant, startled violence. She hadn't guessed that he had gone so far in his thoughts. When he had printed their two names in the sand she had taken it as a sort of pact, as an agreement that they would help each other out of their immediate difficulties. Now the situation was altered for her. He waited for her to reply as if he considered that what he had suggested needed neither explanation nor embellishment.

She stammered: "You said, in that restaurant . . ."

He broke in, without looking at her: "We could say that we're going to marry in about six months. I don't like saying what isn't true, but we've got to say something. Six months will give you time to think things over, to find out whether you can stick it or not. And it would keep people's mouths shut. Not that I care," he added aggressively, "what they say. I'm past that; but I've got to think of you."

She got up quickly and stood for a moment looking down at him, then, her hands in the pockets of her coat, she walked away a little distance. Had he made

the suggestion simply for her sake? Because she was in difficulties? Or had he some other motive? Had he perhaps thought of marrying her because he had nowhere to turn for help, and wanted to make certain of securing even such dubious help as she could give? Presently she returned, still puzzled and said, hesitating:

"You wouldn't hold me to it, would you?"

"So that's what's the matter, is it?" he asked, looking intently at her. "Now just be sensible. I didn't want anyone to think you were just a girl I'd picked up, that's all. One minute you try to drown yourself and the next you're worrying yourself because someone who's trying to help you may be taking an unfair advantage of you. You can take six months to think things over. If you can't make up your mind by the end of six months, I'll have to make it up for you. And let me tell you this; I'm not going to get maudlin about you, so don't expect it."

She cried angrily: "I don't want you to get maudlin about me. It's the last thing I'd want."

"Maybe it'll be the last thing you'll get," he said with a sudden smile. "Think that over. We ought to be moving." He looked at his wrist watch. "Come on, let's pack up."

She began to tidy away the remains of the lunch. His self assurance both steadied and annoyed her. She liked it, yet felt she ought to resent it. Then she thought: "Who are you to resent anything? You've put yourself in his hands. Be thankful you can trust him." And she was ashamed of not having trusted him.

As she got on the pillion seat behind him she broke a silence that had lasted for some minutes.

"All right, you can tell them what you said to me."

She heard, above the noise of the starting engine, his casual and indifferent, "O.K."

6

THEY crossed on the Townshend Ferry, and it was stormy. She was not seasick, however, and stayed out of doors in the wind, tasting the salt spray and wearing her raincoat like a cape over her tweed coat. Alan got into talk with a man driving a small car whom he seemed to know, and she hardly spoke to him during the crossing.

"One of our people at the factory," he explained to her later. "He's been to Paris on business. He says it'll be war inside of a month."

She looked at him with an appeal in her eyes.

"I hope you won't go," she said.

"I'll go if they'll let me."

They could see the English coastline now, and over their heads gulls crowded the air and filled their ears with their lonely crying.

Since he had made his first difficult, terse statement about his own life at Callac le Petit, he had told her little about himself. Both withheld confidences, feeling that there would be a time for them, but that it was not yet. Indeed, she wondered if she could ever unlock for him her Pandora's box of troubles, and how they would sound to his ears if she did. More and more these troubles began, in retrospect, to seem like trivia compared with his own, and at times she felt an urge to invent for him some dark, compelling reason for her despair, and had to push the thought away in self-disgust. Whatever she told him, it must be the truth. "My father killed a man." She could guess how hard

it had been for him to say it. And how explain to a young man so steeped in tragedy himself, the slow piling-up of small frustrations, of disappointments, disillusionments, all bound together like a bundle of evil faggots by one life-long antipathy? To make it sound plausible to him would be, she guessed, no easy task. But why explain at all? Here she was, as a result of all these things, and let him account for her attempt to end her life as he thought fit. No doubt he had already arrived at conclusions of his own, and these would do until he was obliged to revise them.

At any rate, thanks to him her anxiety as to her immediate future had lost its edge. The responsibility for her well-being had now become his; he had assumed it of his own free will, and for his own purposes. As to the story he was to tell his mother, his brother, such neighbours as they might have, it bound her to nothing and solved their immediate difficulties. She was certain that he was not likely to change his attitude towards her because of it; he was not, she believed, attracted to her, which was all for the best. She was a problem that had presented itself in his path, and in solving it he had temporarily solved one of his own.

What she most liked and admired about him was his ability to cope with situations; to deal quietly and intelligently with a faulty piece of machinery, a French *gendarme*, an irritable Customs official, a crowded boat, a hitch of any sort. He seemed, she thought, unlike herself, to live in a world in which he was at home, and to regard it with unastonished and accustomed eyes. This faculty, she thought, had not been acquired; it was native to him. Even in a world at war, she guessed, he would continue to feel at home. There was something curiously adult about him, though she

suspected that he had a playful, boyish side of which he had so far only given her hints. She knew she had been fortunate in her encounter; she only hoped she would not fail him.

From Dover to Devizes she was too tired to take pleasure in the ride, or in the country through which they passed. She clung on in a weary daze, exhausted in mind and body. When they stopped at an inn for a cup of tea, he told her his plans. He proposed leaving her in the village, in Burley, while he went home and prepared his family for her arrival. He would get old Mrs. Boles to make up a bed for her, and he would return for her in about an hour. "I'll have to tell my mother to-night," he said, "because it's a small house and she'd be sure to hear your voice. But I think it would be best if you didn't see her until to-morrow." Then a look on her face made him say: "Don't worry, it's going to be all right. Think of her as a child. That's what she is. She couldn't face what she had to face. She went right back to a time when she was happy, when she was a little girl of nine or ten. Sometimes she seems younger than that, sometimes a bit older. And yet the queer thing is, she knows George and I are her sons. Simple is what she is. There are worse things, I suppose."

A soft, thick dusk was falling when they reached Burley. The village lay on either side of a small, cressy stream bordered by pollard willows. It had a wide cobbled street with small shops and houses—one or two of the latter Georgian and of substantial size—on either side, and in the centre of it was a 1914-1918 war memorial in the form of a tall cross. A narrow and very old stone bridge with a humped back connected the two halves of the village. Close to the bridge on

one side was a church surrounded thickly by trees and on the other side was the inn, the "Wheat Sheaf," and the Post Office. It was a warm, still evening threaded with voices and the barking of dogs, and people were walking about the main street and sitting on their doorsteps or in their front gardens. Some of them looked up as the motor cycle noisily crossed the bridge and stopped in front of the "Wheat Sheaf," and one or two called out greetings to Alan, who answered briefly. He took Mary into the inn and asked the proprietor, a short, stout man in riding breeches, to give her some supper.

"This is Mr. Luck," he said, "a good friend of mine. He'll look after you. I'll be back in an hour."

Mr. Luck, to her great relief, showed no curiosity about her whatever. It was clear that he thought the village of greater interest and importance than the outside world. They had had good weather, he said, for the harvest, and everybody had been busy helping to get it in. If the rain would only hold off for another week, all would be well. She went upstairs to tidy herself and found the interior scrubbed, waxed and polished. Looking at herself in the glass she thought she had often looked more tired and congratulated herself on having stood the journey so well. She presently went down to a supper of cold beef, salad and plum tart brought to her in the dining-room by Mr. Luck himself, and he continued to talk to her about local affairs until Alan's return. Looking quickly at his face she thought he seemed confident.

"I'll just pay for your supper," he said.

"I've paid," she told him. "Don't forget I have nearly fifteen pounds."

"You'd have had more if you'd waited till we got to England."

"It'll do for the present," she said.

As they went out to get on the motor cycle, he said :

"George is pretty excited. He thinks I'm telling him fairy tales. He's a good lad, I hope you'll like him. I've moved into his room—there are two beds in it—and you'll have to sleep in mine. Mrs. Boles sleeps in my mother's room."

"Oh," said Mary. "Then when she goes, shouldn't I . . . ?"

"No," he said, as she got up behind him. "I'll rig up an electrical gadget so that if she wants anything in the night, her bell will ring in my room."

Only to strangers, she soon learnt, did Alan and George speak of Mrs. Garstin as "mother." At home they referred to her simply as "her," or "she." Their lives were built around hers, she was the childish, incalculable deity of the house. Something of this Mary had already guessed. Two daughters might have been expected to carry this burden and carry it lovingly ; it was an amazing thing, she thought, that two boys should carry it of their own free will. Holding to Alan's waist as they sped out of the village, she took a pride in his unusualness, and in the unusualness of his situation. It set him apart, he was not the ordinary young man she had at first taken him for. Her hands tightly pressing his belt, she thought, "He's all I have now to hold to."

They went up a hill rising directly from the water meadows. An almost full moon possessed the sky and the night, and she felt she was in an improbable dream invented between sleep and waking. The road took them through beechwoods, the trunks of the trees lit theatrically by the headlight, then out over a bare and chalky upland from which they could see moonlit harvested fields around and below them. The road

then ran downhill among trees, where the lighted windows of farms showed cosily, and along a narrow lane between hedges, where they presently stopped at a small white gate. Looking with anxious eyes at what was to be her home she saw a squarely built stone cottage, its windows lighted and no curtains drawn. In an upper room figures were moving and for an instant she caught a glimpse of a woman with long, tied-back hair falling between her shoulders.

"Mrs. Boles is putting her to bed," Alan said.

The front door opened and a tall boy came out to meet them. He came awkwardly, with shy uncertainty, as if he were being impelled slowly but with firmness from behind. In the light from the open door Mary saw a head of rough fair hair.

"Here's George," said Alan, holding the gate open. Mary put out her hand.

"How are you, George?" she said.

The boy made an unintelligible answer, dropped her hand quickly and said, turning to Alan, "Let me put the bike away."

As George disappeared around the corner of the house, Alan said:

"He'll be all right when he gets used to you. He doesn't see enough people, poor kid."

He took her into the living-room, a square cottagy room with a round table in the centre of it, on which an oil lamp with a white china shade shed its homely light. Mary, glancing quickly around her, saw that the walls were papered with an old-fashioned paper and hung with a few prints. There was an open brick fireplace and on the mantel above it stood a clock and a pair of spotted china dogs. On the opposite wall there were bookshelves filled with shabby books. There

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

were two easy chairs, with sagging seats and faded covers, and an old-fashioned sofa. Four small mahogany chairs were pushed close up to the table, which had a red cloth cover on it. The carpet was old and patched, but clean, and the room smelled of wax polish and paraffin. On a small table in the window a few flowers were arranged stiffly in a white vase.

"This is the only sitting-room," Alan said, but it was merely a statement of fact, without apologetic overtones. "We have our breakfast in the kitchen, and our supper in here. Mrs. Boles is staying till day after to-morrow, so she can show you the ropes. Sit down," he added, "and give me your things; I'll take them upstairs."

While he was out of the room George returned and seeing her in the room alone, paused in the doorway, as if inclined to turn and go away. Then he changed his mind, came in and sat down on the sofa, across the room from her. He was the most adolescent creature, she thought, that she had ever seen. Ivor was growing up tidily, all of a piece, without awkwardness; this boy was like something struggling to break through a confining chrysalis, cracking it here and there in his efforts to emerge. He was going to be taller than Alan, if larger hands and feet were any indication. His features, too, were larger, and his whole face looked swollen, as if he had slept too hard. He gave her a shy smile and looked down at his feet.

"I expect you're glad to have Alan back," she said.

He nodded, swallowed, and said, clasping his hands in front of him, elbows on knees, a trick Alan had when talking.

"I could have gone with him. He asked me to."

His voice was hoarse and uncertain, and the sound

of his own words evidently embarrassed him. She thought, "Here's someone I ought to be able to understand!"

"Why didn't you go with him?" she asked.

"I didn't think we both ought to leave *her*," he said. "Last year I went to a holiday camp, and Alan stayed at home. Anyway, I'd promised to help Mr. Whately with his garden. I wanted to earn some money."

"Who's Mr. Whately?"

"He's the rector."

To his evident relief, Alan came down and he moved over to make room for him on the sofa. Alan took a tuft of his wild hair in his hand and gently shook his head.

"How is tha', lad?"

"Champion," said the boy with a grin.

"When we're together we sometimes talk Yorkshire," Alan said, looking over at her with a smile.

He suddenly seemed to her a stranger, someone she hardly knew. It was difficult to believe that she had travelled with him from Callac le Petit, or that he had printed their two names there in the sand. All that had gone before now seemed to her unreal.

The boy looked at his brother, then at Mary, and asked:

"Is it true, what you told me? You aren't joking?"

Alan said quickly, "Look, lad, this is how it is. We aren't sure, do you see? It depends on how things work out. In six months' time we'll know better. Then perhaps it'll be yes and perhaps it won't."

"You always said you'd never get married," George said, and twisted his large hands in an agony at having said the words.

"One says a lot of things at different times," Alan told him. "You used to say you were going into the Church."

"I am going," the boy said.

"What?" Alan looked startled. "What's made you decide that?"

"Oh, a lot of things. I'm not going back on it. I've made up my mind."

"O.K. You can tell me about it later," Alan said.

"It's where I want to be," George told him. "I stopped talking about it, because I knew you didn't like it, but I never stopped thinking about it."

"All right," Alan said. "It's your life. I've said nothing against the Church, have I?"

"No," the boy said. "But you wanted me to be a teacher."

"Well," said Alan, "there's lots of time. We can talk about it later."

There were footsteps on the stairs and Mrs. Boles came in. She walked stiffly and held on to the back of a chair to cross the room.

"This is Miss Mary Hallam, Mrs. Boles," Alan said.

Mary got up and shook hands with the old woman, who drew a small chair out from the table and sat down on it, her hands under her apron. Mary thought she had never seen anyone so bloodless, so like a decent, tidily dressed corpse, ready for its burial. Except for her white apron she was all in black, and her temples, nose, forehead seemed transparent. Her pale, sunken lips when they parted in a smile, showed bloodless gums. She smelt of the years, though she was clean as a scrubbed pine table. She looked at Mary with bright, impersonal old eyes, like currants, devoid of expression, used only for seeing objects that needed her attention.

"You'll be company for the boys, miss," she said, sitting very upright. "It'll be nice for them to have a young lady in the house." She turned to Alan.

"Well, I put her to bed, she was as good as gold and went like a lamb. 'Alan's home,' she kept saying, 'Alan's home, Mrs. Boles.' She's been no trouble at all lately. And she's taken to sewing again. Two packets of needles I've bought, knowing you wouldn't grudge them to her, poor soul. I've kept accounts of everything, and I hope you'll find everything right. I shouldn't like everything not to be right."

"Of course it's right, Mrs. Boles. I don't know what we'd have done without you all this time."

"I'm not able to get about as I used to, that's where it is," said the old woman, with a mixture of pride and humility. "If it wasn't for the stairs I might stay on, but I can't manage the stairs, not with my legs. Doctor said, 'Mrs. Boles,' he said, 'it's time soemone took care of you instead of you taking care of them,' he said, but I said, 'Who's going to take care of me, doctor? I've done for others since I was twelve, and I'll go on doing for others till the end,' I said. That's where it is."

"And she will," thought Mary. Alan presently went into the kitchen with Mrs. Boles to look over the accounts, and Mary and George were left alone again. Mary asked him who had helped them before Mrs. Boles came, and he said that an aunt had lived with them, his mother's younger sister, a widow, but that she had married again two years ago and had gone to Canada.

"Isn't it awfully lonely for you?" she asked him.

He shook his head. "Not for me," His face took on an expression of exaggerated seriousness. "I always have plenty of think about."

"Aren't you rather young to decide you want to go into the Church?" she asked him next, and he looked up at her and answered, shrewdly:

"You wouldn't say that if I wanted to be an engineer or a policeman or a sailor."

"Well, perhaps I wouldn't," she agreed. There was a long silence and then he asked her if Alan had told her they had a bathroom. She said he hadn't, and indeed the matter had been much in her mind. She had feared an out-of-door privy, and the most primitive sort of washing arrangements.

"Alan built it three years ago," he said, and got up. "I'll show you if you like."

She followed him through the kitchen, where Alan and Mrs. Boles were sitting at the table. It was a pleasant little room, and contained a tall dresser, an oil stove, a small boiler, a sink and four kitchen chairs. Wherever she looked there was order and neatness. George threw open the door of a lean-to, and said, "Here it is," in a voice full of boyish pride. She saw a white enamelled tub, a hand basin with running water, a cement floor and walls of pitch pine.

"Did Alan really do all this himself?" she asked, marvelling.

"I helped him a bit, but I was only a kid of twelve then," the boy said. "And a chap in the village helped with the plumbing. Alan did all the rest. The bath tub cost ten pounds," he added.

"It's beautiful," Mary said.

As they passed through the kitchen again Alan glanced up at her and said in a brisk, impersonal way:

"You're dead tired. George, take her upstairs now and show her her room." And he added, "Breakfast's at seven-thirty."

Mary admitted that she was more than ready for bed, said good night, and gladly followed George up the stairs. On the upper floor there were three bedrooms

and a large cupboard, half hanging closet, half boxroom. They tiptoed past Mrs. Garstin's door, and George opened the door of a small room to the left of the stairs. "Here's where you'll sleep," he said. "It's full of Alan's things. He says he'll clear them out to-morrow."

It was a small neat room with white casement curtains at the one window and a clean white bedspread on the iron single bed. Besides a table and a chair there was a chest of drawers full of Alan's clothes neatly arranged, a hanging mirror, and over the bed two shelves filled with books. Curious, she approached them, lamp in hand, as soon as George had gone out. Now, she thought, she would learn more about Alan than he had yet told her. Holding up the lamp she scrutinised their titles. On the top shelf were two "Westerns," an old volume of *Sherlock Holmes*, a single volume of Shakespeare containing only the tragedies, and in very small print; a Bible; *Pilgrim's Progress*—a school prize—and a book of Kipling's verse. "I'm sorry he likes Kipling," she thought, in accord with her generation. On the lower shelf were *The Broken Road*, by A. E. W. Mason, Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, a book on Wiltshire, three technical books on electrical engineering, and a book on gardening. On the whole, he came well out of this examination. She thought that with some of her money she'd buy a few modern books for him, and began to make out a mental list. She waited till all the noises of the house had ceased except for a murmur of talk from the room where George and Alan were, before slipping down the stairs and into the bathroom. Surely, she thought, Alan couldn't run this house and pay Mrs. Boles out of what he earned. She had no idea what wages he received, but it seemed likely that Mrs. Garstin was

not penniless. Probably, she thought, she had an annuity, if perhaps a small one. But Alan, she realised had a talent for living, for managing his affairs. There was nothing at all of the helpless male about him. She guessed that he would regard her poor efforts at housekeeping with pitying contempt. The thought, of the morning and her first meeting with Mrs. Garstin kept her awake for some time, but at last she slept, uneasily, for the bed was hard and her fears produced one alarming dream after another. As there was neither bolt nor key, she had put a chair against her door, thinking that Mrs. Garstin might perhaps wander in her sleep and that if she pushed open the door she would hear her and wake. Suddenly, in the midst of her dreams, she heard a voice; it seemed to speak loudly and clearly within her very ear, inside her head. With a start she was wide awake, and the penetrating, pervasive tones continued to echo, like the reverberations of a gong. Never before had she had such an experience. "Be not afraid," the voice had said, and now, wide awake, she could hear the diminishing echo repeating itself, "Be not afraid," "Be not afraid," in dying waves of sound. She lay listening with her whole being, in a state of excited expectancy. Would there be more? Where had it come from? Who or what had spoken? Whether or not the words had been a part of her dream, so vivid had been the experience that in imagination she could re-create the sound of the words at will, and once again hear the voice in her ear, as if called out to her from the end of an echoing tunnel. Wherever it came from, it was the message of all messages that she needed. She knew that it was fear and fear alone that had driven her down the sands and into the sea, an accumulation

of fears never admitted, never expressed. Looking back over her life she saw that her every act had been dictated by fear; fear for her own future, fear of disappointment, fear of loneliness, fear of failure. She had snatched too hastily at Ferdinand Walsh because she was afraid. In the dark little room she turned a new scrutiny upon her hatred of Letty, and that too, she now saw, had arisen from childish fear of her. Fear of her father, too much a stranger to her, had kept them apart. And fear of what she would find at the end of this journey had tormented her during every mile of it. For the first time she clearly saw how utterly illogical it was to fear for the fate of what she had tried her hardest to destroy. By the slenderest of chances, she still lived. She had no real right to life. To live in a continual state of nervous apprehension over something she had already discarded, was, she saw, the supremest folly. "Relax," she said to herself, and gradually she let every tense muscle and sinew go, drew in her breath gently and let time flow over her, softly and darkly, aware of a sense of peace and a quiet exaltation.

She woke to the twittering of birds, looked out on a small, somewhat neglected garden, saw that a soft rain was falling, and dressed quickly. She was downstairs before Alan or George, though Mrs. Boles had been up and about for half an hour, and the water was boiling on the oil stove for tea. She helped the old woman, who said that the damp made her joints stiffer, and took note of all that she said and did. Breakfast, she saw, was not a complicated affair. They had tea, porridge, bacon, bread and butter, jam. - Mrs. Garstin stayed quietly in her bed, Mrs. Boles said, till a tray was taken up to her. She usually had tea and a bit of

toast—made on top of the oil stove on a home-made tin contrivance—marmalade and butter. She got up at about half-past nine, and dressed herself, but she needed help as a rule, otherwise she was apt to put on the wrong things. "Don't let her decide nothing for herself," Mrs. Boles said. "She does what she's told, but choosing's too much for her poor head, that's where it is." First Alan and then George went through the kitchen to wash, both wearing dressing-gowns of coarse towelling over their pyjamas, probably put on, Mary guessed, as a concession to her. There was no hot water in the morning; the boiler was lighted and baths were taken three times a week and at night. Alan had a kettle of hot water to shave with. In winter, Mrs. Boles said, the kitchen was warmed by an oil heater, and there was another for Mrs. Garstin's room, while the boys kept the house supplied with wood for the sitting-room fire. Alan, she said, was as good a housekeeper as any woman and better than most. "Surprising what he knows," she said, "but he's carried a burden since he was a lad, and that's made him wise before his time. Don't seem as if he needs anyone to tell him anything. He'll make a good husband; not like my old man that never put a kettle on the stove for himself, not in all the forty-five years we was married. No, nor ever made himself a cup of tea."

As he ate his breakfast, Alan asked Mary if she had had a good night.

"Very good," she told him.

"The bed's hard," he said.

"I got used to it."

"I'll clear the things out of the drawers to-night. And on my way home I'll stop at the Post Office to see if any of your parcels have come."

"I hope they have," she said. "Anyway, I'll do some washing to-day." She caught a look of what she took for amusement in his eyes and added, "Perhaps Mrs. Boles will help me. I've never done any washing or ironing." Mrs. Boles looked at her as if she could not have heard her correctly, said, "Never done . . . ?" and then fell silent, as if the matter were beyond her comprehension.

After Alan left, George set off on his bicycle to go to Mr. Whately's. The rector, it appeared, was coaching him during the holidays, for it was a matter of vital importance to George that he should win a scholarship, and the boy spent the rest of the day working in the Rector's garden, coming home in time for supper, but sometimes staying on for further coaching in the evening. No reference was made at breakfast to the piece of news George had divulged the evening before, but Mary guessed that the two had talked about it well into the night. She helped Mrs. Boles with the cleaning and tidying of kitchen and sitting-room, and the old woman then went upstairs to Mrs. Garstin's room with a tray and remained up there, while Mary sat in the sitting-room darning her three pairs of stockings. She could hear the voices of the two women over her head, Mrs. Garstin's a curiously light and childish treble. She felt that since last night she had turned a fresh page of her life, that she had put the past behind her. It was not possible to feel re-born, she was what she had been for twenty-four years, but she had resolved to cast out fear, and she was conscious of an inner quiet, a total lack of apprehensiveness that was new and infinitely agreeable. As her needle went in and out she told herself that she had not a worry now, in the world. If her health continued to improve

—and she was now beginning to believe it might—she had little to wish for. She liked George. She liked, trusted and even admired Alan. She was not going to be afraid of Mrs. Garstin. She had work to do. Any future she might have was a gift from the gods through their instrument, Jean Fourniaux. It was as simple as that. When she had grown accustomed to her surroundings and had found her feet, she would write to her father. She might even write to Letty. She had already posted a letter to Lucille, on her way through Brittany. She would write to Maud. That amazing altercation to which she had listened through Lowell's bedroom door was now fading a little from her mind, though its implications still puzzled and tormented her. If she could only *know*. Any light on any facts would have been welcome. Had Letty spent that night with Ferdinand? Was he her lover? Did her father suspect that Letty was unfaithful to him? Was Maud *that* sort of woman? Was M. Karsky the wicked old man, the revolting, unspeakable character she thought him? Did he intend . . . *that*? Had she been in real danger? If she could only know.

The voices from above became suddenly louder, and there were steps on the stairs. "And now you'll see the nice young lady Alan's brought back with him," she heard Mrs. Boles say, as if she were speaking to a child. "She's going to look after the house when I've gone, just like he told you. Come along, dear. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Quickly Mary put down her darning. Mrs. Garstin was afraid. She was frightened at the thought of a stranger in the house. Oh, the poor creature! Her own lingering dreads vanished in an instant as Mrs. Boles came in holding the arm of a thin woman with

fair, whitening hair worn in a great bun, large blue eyes which rolled too much in their sockets and features that must once have been irresistibly pretty. The short upper lip parted a little from the lower, and the whole expression was that of a child on its best behaviour, trying hard to remember to do and say correctly all that it had been told to do and say. It was a personality so appealing, so pathetic, so hesitant that Mary was half afraid to go forward for fear of giving alarm. But she went, holding out her hand, and Mrs. Boles, a little roughly but with kindly intent, pushed forward the right hand of her charge.

"I am Mary Hallam," Mary said, "I came last night. How do you do?"

"I'm better, thank you," said Mrs. Garstin, and Mrs. Boles put in, in an undertone, "She always says she's better, poor lamb."

"I've been doing some mending," Mary said, not knowing what to talk about. "My stockings were full of holes."

Mrs. Garstin nodded and then looked inquiringly at Mrs. Boles.

"Yes, dear," said the old woman, "I know. I've forgotten your sewing. I'll just go up and get it."

Mary said she would go, and asked where it was. On the windowsill in Mrs. Garstin's room, the old woman said, and Mary ran upstairs. This was the largest bedroom, and was filled with things that must have belonged to Mrs. Garstin's early youth. There were Victorian engravings on the walls and some china and bric-a-brac of the same period arranged on hanging shelves. There were no books. On the windowsill was a large wicker work-basket, open, in which she saw bits of coloured silks sewn together anyhow.

There was a dressing-table and mirror, but there was nothing in the way of toilet articles or bottles visible. On a bedside table were two framed photographs of Alan and George, taken some years earlier. The bed was covered with a bright pink spread and at the windows were gay flowered curtains. Flowers were stuck stiffly here and there into small narrow-necked vases, probably by Mrs. Boles. She ran down with the sewing-basket and set it on the table, and at once Mrs. Garstin held out her hands for it.

"Wait, dear," said Mrs. Boles. "I'll thread the needle for you. Now just sit quiet and talk to the young lady, there's a good girl."

Mrs. Garstin turned her head away, like a shy child, but a moment later, as Mary picked up her mending, she felt that the sweet and empty blue eyes were watching her.

Mary looked up at her and smiled.

"I'm not very good at darning," she said.

"I can do beautiful darning," said Mrs. Garstin in her clear, expressionless treble, "but Mrs. Boles won't let me. Mrs. Boles is naughty; sometimes she's wicked." And she drew her lips together and nodded her head gravely. "Sometimes she shuts me up in a dark cupboard, and I cry till she lets me out."

"That's just one of the stories she likes to make up," said Mrs. Boles, comfortably. "Poor lamb! Here, ducks, here's your needle and cotton, and here are the bits of stuff. Now which would you like to sew together to-day?"

Mrs. Garstin looked at her, at the bits of material, and her hands hovered vaguely; then she rolled her eyes helplessly and pathetically towards Mary. Mrs. Boles had done the very thing she had warned Mary not to do, and had forced upon her the agony of making

a decision. Mary saw the difficulty and said: "Let's put all the blue ones together." Mrs. Garstin nodded and her hands at once busied themselves picking out the different shades of blue. "There now," said Mrs. Boles, "I'll be forgetting my own name, next. Fancy me forgetting, and asking her to choose! I'm getting as silly as she is, that's where it is."

Mary began to wonder, not for the first time since they had come downstairs, whether Mrs. Boles was the best person to be in charge of Mrs. Garstin. Just as well, she thought, that she was going. Surely that was not the way to talk in her hearing. And she wondered if Alan's affection for his mother had not led him astray in the matter of keeping her there. She might have gone to some good home; she might even have been cured. She knew she was totally inexperienced in such matters, but she had an uneasy feeling that Mrs. Garstin might have responded to modern methods of treatment, and that a foolish, kindly old woman like Mrs. Boles did her more harm than good. Mrs. Boles presently indicated by signs and movements of the head that if all were well, she would leave her charge with Mary and get on with her work. Mary nodded to her and she went out, and Mrs. Garstin went on sewing odd bits of material together with a look of childish absorption in her face, looking up, now and then, to give Mary a quick shy glance. How pretty she must have been, Mary thought, going on with her darning and waiting to see if Mrs. Garstin would speak; how lovely, in fact. Could that face have been the pathetic cause, perhaps, of the tragedy? When would Alan tell her? She glanced out of the window and saw that the rain had stopped. It was growing lighter, clouds were breaking and all the

green foliage about the house glistened with wet. She looked down at Mrs. Garstin's feet. She wore a blue cotton dress and an old grey cardigan, a little tight from many washings. Her shoes were thickly soled and buttoned across her instep with a single strap. She was well shod for walking even on wet roads, and Mary thought she might take her along the lane a little way.

"Would you like a walk?" she asked.

Mrs. Garstin looked up with an air of surprise.

"Is it Sunday?" she asked.

"No," Mary said. "It's Thursday, but couldn't we go just the same?" And then she understood. Mrs. Boles found walking so difficult that it was probably left to Alan or George to take her out when Sunday came. "I would like a walk, if you would."

Mrs. Garstin dropped her hands into her lap and once again Mary saw the look of distress in her eyes, which roved from side to side in an agony of uncertainty. "We'll go," Mary said, firmly. "I'd like to go. You see, I only came last night, and I haven't been out yet. Then we can finish our sewing when we come back."

Mrs. Garstin at once looked relieved and happy. She bundled her bits of stuff into the basket and got up. Mary took her arm and they went out together, Mrs. Garstin smiling shyly and eagerly like a child that is being given a treat by someone it trusts but knows only slightly. A small brick path led to the gate, on either side of which were tall lilac bushes. The lane, curving and narrow, continued for a hundred yards or so to the left and ended at a wide farm gate. On the other side of the gate were meadows, where cows were grazing. From this farm, Mrs. Boles had told her, they got milk, butter and eggs. The house could

just be seen screened by tall elms. They walked as far as the gate, slowly, Mrs. Garstin on Mary's arm. She was light and walked with a curiously springing step. Mary asked her if she liked walking and Mrs. Garstin said that she did but that she was afraid of meeting strangers. "I don't like people," she said. "They stare at me. They're wicked. I'm wicked too, but I don't stare. I know it's rude."

"You're not wicked," Mary said. "Alan and George wouldn't love you if you were."

Her head nodded solemnly, childishly. "I am. I am very, very, very wicked. The most wicked person in the world. George and Alan love me because I'm their mother, but I'm very wicked." And she gave Mary a grave and portentous look. The air was delicious with the scent of ferns and wet earth, and the sun now came out warm and bright, and every raindrop glistened.

"How beautiful it is!" Mary said, hoping to turn her mind to other topics. Over to the south there rose up in a clear and lovely line the chalk downs, with heavy clumps of trees on their sides and summits, looking dark and solid. The whole countryside undulated, rising softly here, falling softly there, and the yellow harvested fields made lovely patterns against the distant blues and greens of hill and meadow. Turning, she looked back, down the lane, and saw the stones of which the Garstins' cottage was made looking umber where the rain had washed them, and the small-paned windows reflecting back the new fresh blue of the sky. She looked at Mrs. Garstin and met her wild, shy, unsteady eyes; she seemed to be waiting for a cue, lips parted, faded hair blowing a little in the light, soft air. What now, what next? she seemed to ask, and stood, uncertainly, one hand on the gate, as though

eager to follow any suggestion made to her with a pleased child's ready obedience. "What is she *thinking*?" Mary wondered, and said, aloud: "You live in a very nice cottage. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Garstin turned her head and looked at the cottage as if she were trying to see it afresh; then she looked at Mary and her unquiet eyes became brilliant with what she wanted to express.

"I was angry with it once," she said, on the very brink of her story-telling.

"Oh?" Mary said. "Why was that?"

"I gave a party," said Mrs. Garstin, and she bent down and began pulling at the wet grass as if overcome by sudden shyness. "I asked a lot of people, two hundred people, and they all came up the lane, some in cars, some in carriages, some walking, and *some*," she said, looking up through her silver-gold hair which had fallen over her forehead, "some came in aeroplanes. *And*," she said, standing up again and dropping the grass in order to clasp her hands together in a sort of ecstasy, "they were all dressed in their best clothes; you never saw such a sight. Crowds of them; and they brought their little children, too. *So*," she said, "that naughty cottage saw them coming and it made itself as small as it could. Yes, it drew in its sides and it drew down its roof until there was only room in it for two people. 'Just two,' it said, crossly, 'no more.' You can imagine how dreadfully embarrassing it was for me. I stood on the step and shouted to the people that they must go away and come another day, but they couldn't hear me; they were talking and laughing so much. They pressed round the cottage, more and more and more of them. I had tea and cakes and lemonade ready for them inside and they

knew it, and they wanted to get in. But the cottage grew smaller still, and it said: 'There's only room for one now.' And when they found they really couldn't get in they were angry, dreadfully angry. So, I had to squeeze inside, all by myself, and hand the tea and cakes and lemonade through the windows. But it spoilt the party, and when it came on to rain they all hurried away without even saying good-bye. A nice house wouldn't have done that, would it?"

Did she or didn't she know, Mary wondered, that she was relating a fantasy of her own imagining? There was such an odd, mischievous gleam in her blue eyes—eyes that fixed upon any object so rarely—that she felt uncertain. "It's one of her dreams," she thought. "I've had dreams very like it myself. The dream is the reality to her, and the reality the dream." "Perhaps," she said aloud, "houses have their moods, like people. Who found the cottage? Did Alan?"

But facts perplexed her; asked a direct question she grew confused, unhappy, and Mary was reminded of a pet collie she had once owned who, when he was told to do a trick he had forgotten, looked at her with a look equally bewildered and apologetic.

"But I don't think it was lost," Mrs. Garstin presently offered in her gentle, toneless voice. "I don't think so, but I can't always remember."

"I'd like to walk down the lane a little way now," Mary said firmly. "I'd like to walk as far as the next farm gate if you're not tired."

Mrs. Garstin took her arm, smiling her assent, and walked beside her, slightly raising herself on her toes at each step.

"We're like two sisters," she said. "Two sisters

who've met after a great many years. I wonder where we've been all this time. Don't you?"

"It would be interesting to know, wouldn't it?" said Mary, and then (thinking, "I mustn't deal too much in fantasy, it may be bad for her"), said: "Most of the time, of course, I've been in London."

"In London," echoed Mrs. Garstin, and added, thoughtfully, "perhaps at the Army and Navy Stores."

Her mention of this shop, with which people living in the country so frequently dealt, encouraged Mary.

"Well, I've often been there," she said. "To buy things."

Mrs. Garstin considered this. "Was it guns or ropes you went for?" she then asked.

"Neither," Mary answered. "Once I bought a Kodak, I remember, and once I bought a dog, a little collie puppy. I loved him more than anything in the world."

"More than your mother or your father?"

"More than anything I had to play with, I mean."

"Then," asked Mrs. Garstin, "why didn't you bring him with you?"

"He died a long time ago."

Her arm was clutched convulsively.

"He . . . died!"

"Well," said Mary, fearful of having made a blunder, "he was very old. He's buried under a beech tree in the country and blue-bells grow on his grave."

"He died! Oh," Mrs. Garstin whispered, "how dreadful!"

And Mary thought: "I must never speak of death again."

Mrs. Garstin loosened her tight clutch of her arm, and paused in the rutted lane, which, except that it

was open to the sky, looked as though it had been carved out of the thick dark foliage by an apple-corer. "I'll tell you something," she whispered, "if you'll promise never to tell anyone else. We all die. You and I and everybody."

Mary nodded. "Yes," she said, "I suppose we do. But never mind, we're alive now. And so are Alan and George and Mrs. Boles, and the birds and the cows, all alive together."

"So we are," said Mrs. Garstin, and nodded, and resumed her springing walk, smiling once more.

"Alive," thought Mary. "I, alive? I who've no right to be alive? Can anyone, who has thrown away life, ever really live it again? But I am, I *am* living it." And she lifted up her face to the sky, where the clouds were packing away, and the sun bursting hotly out and retreating again and bringing warm odours out of the lane and the dripping hedges. "I am, I am living it."

They walked as far as the farm gate where a sign, the lettering made faint by rains, said: "Day-old chicks for sale, cut flowers, honey, apples." She knew it was useless to ask who lived there, and after righting a beetle which had fallen on its back on its journey down the bank, they turned towards home, Mrs. Garstin stepping now and again, carelessly or with childish purpose, into puddles, so that on their return Mary had to find dry shoes for her and did not know whether to scold her or not. Mrs. Boles had no such scruples, and shook a crooked forefinger at her, saying:

"You're a naughty, naughty girl! How many times have I told you to keep your feet dry?"

They put her sewing into her hands, and Mary went into the kitchen to talk to Mrs. Boles from whom she had much to learn. The farm at the end of the lane

belonged to a farmer named Hobday, she said. There were Mr. and Mrs. Hobday and a daughter named Betty, a pert miss, though she and Alan and George were friendly-like. There had been talk, she said, of her and Alan, but they'd have a different tale to tell now, and she looked at Mary with her black-currant eyes and smiled her indrawn, toothless smile. Decent people, she said, she had nothing against them. Down below at the lower farm were Mr. Bailey and his sons, Arthur and Dick; his daughter, Mrs. Dykes and her husband, and a cowman. Mr. Bailey and his sons spent too much time, in her opinion, at the pub, drinking beer and playing darts, but the Dykes were the right sort, and sometimes Will Dykes and Alan went out together after rabbits or a partridge. "But you wouldn't say any of them was really friendly with the Garstins. Seems as if the folks here was suspicious-like of anyone as doesn't farm their own land." She sniffed. "That's where it is," she said.

For lunch there were cold sausage rolls which Mrs. Boles had made the day before, and a milk pudding. For the supper there were pork chops and mushrooms, picked that morning in the fields, and before she left, she said, she'd "rattle up" a treacle pudding, as she'd got a bit of suet, and put it on to boil. It was George's favourite. Alan didn't care what he ate, and *she'd* eat anything except spinach.

"Now," said Mrs. Boles, "what else can I tell you?"

A thousand and one things, thought Mary, but there wouldn't be time for them, and she'd have to learn them from Alan and George. She found a battered old cookery book on the kitchen shelf, and made up her mind to study it. She'd seen that oil, coal and wood were kept in the shed, where Alan kept his motor

cycle; she'd learnt how to manage the oil stove and how to fill it. The boiler was George's affair; he cleaned it and lighted it, and all she'd need to do would be to give it a shake down and put coke on it now and again. Mrs. Boles had cleaned the house from top to bottom. If Mary wanted a bit of help sometimes, she said, Mrs. Dykes might come over and lend a hand, but she had two little ones under seven and her own house to look after.

The old woman left after tea. Alan had offered her a lift on the back of the motor-cycle if she'd wait, but nothing, she said, would induce her to get on it. She preferred to walk. Mr. Bailey would fetch her trunk with his horse and cart next day. Mary saw that she was moved when it came to saying good-bye to Mrs. Garstin, whose cheek she kissed. "Two years is two years," she said, "that's where it is." But Mrs. Garstin seemed quite indifferent to her going.

"I have my sister here," she said, and looked at Mary with her blue, restless, unfocusing eyes.

"Sisters, are you?" Mrs. Boles commented. "Well, what next, I wonder?"

When she had gone, picking her way slowly down the lane, a vivid awareness of the strangeness and loneliness of her situation overwhelmed Mary as she stood at the gate. She knew she would count the hours every day until Alan and George came home. Would she be able to endure the loneliness of it, she asked herself, and thought yes, if Alan stayed. And already Mrs. Garstin had cast a sort of spell on her. Her condition had a curious fascination of its own; there was nothing in the least repellent in her state; indeed her personal charm had by no means been destroyed. For the first time in her life she felt herself to be neces-

sary, or in a position to make herself necessary, to other people, and she knew that much depended on her help. She found stimulation in this knowledge. A moment, vivid in her memory, when, a twelve-year-old, she had been permitted to give Ivor a bath, linked up with the present and she knew once again the feeling of childish pride in the performance of a grown-up duty.

Alan's motor cycle came exploding along the lane at half-past six, and after putting it in the shed he came into the kitchen where Mary was delicately handling the pork chops and wondering how long it would be before she could touch raw meat without repugnance. Looking quickly at his face she saw only the unconcerned look she now knew so well, the level regard and the hint of sullenness about the mouth. If he was glad to see her there, if he had looked forward to his homecoming to-day, he gave no sign of it.

"Pork chops," he said. "Mrs. Boles was always buying them. I don't like pork much, do you?"

"No," she said, "but it's all there is. She said I was to fry them."

"Well, see that they're cooked enough. Any potatoes?"

"She didn't say anything about potatoes. There are mushrooms."

He went to a cupboard, took out some potatoes and scrubbed them.

"Don't peel them, just salt them and put them on to boil. I'll go in and see her now, and then I'll come and help you. George won't be home till late. The rector's coaching him this evening."

When he returned to the kitchen again, he said:

"I've heard her version of things. Now let's hear yours."

She asked eagerly: "What did she say?"

"She's forgotten everything I told her last night," he said. "She calls you her sister, but I think she just means that you're someone she likes. I'm afraid old Mother Boles wasn't very good for her."

"Well," said Mary, "she would talk about her in front of her, and I'm sure she oughtn't to. Alan, I never dreamt she'd be so . . . so charming. She must have had a charming mind."

For a moment he said nothing, but watched the pan in which the chops were frying.

"I'll tell you about her to-night," he said. "As George is out, it's a good opportunity," and she wondered if he dreaded it, or if it would be a relief to him to talk.

"Do you mind about George?" she presently wanted to know.

"No. It's his own affair. I know why he wants to do it. I've seen it coming. Well, he may not get a scholarship, and then he'll have to think again. We had a talk last night. He said he'd been worried about leaving her, but now that you're here he thinks he sees the green light." Aware that he was on difficult ground, he broke off to say: "What are you going to do with those mushrooms?"

"I was going to fry them," she said. "I've washed them."

"You haven't peeled them."

"I didn't know I had to." She sighed. "I've got an awful lot to learn."

"That's all right. So have I. Here, give them to me; I'll do it."

He peeled them and dropped them into the frying pan, after pouring off most of the fat.

"Do you always come home as early as this?" she wanted to know.

"Earlier, as a rule. To-night I stopped at the Post Office to see if any of your parcels had come, but they hadn't. If they don't come soon, you'll have to do some shopping."

"I'll have to do some shopping anyway before the winter comes, unless I write home for more clothes."

"Please yourself about that," he said. "If you ask my advice, which you haven't, I'd say write to your father now and tell him you're in England and all right. If you don't want him to know where you are, I can get a chap at the factory who's going to London this week to post your letter there. He's bound to be worried at the thought of your being in France when war comes."

"Is it coming? Are you sure?"

"As sure as I'm alive," he said, and put his hand in his pocket. "Here's the evening paper. Read it while you're waiting for the chops to cook. I'll go and set the table."

Yes, she thought, it certainly looked like it, unless a miracle happened. What hope of that? She put the paper down and thought: "If he goes, I couldn't stay here. I couldn't possibly stay here without him."

At supper, Mrs. Garstin sat between them. She ate like a nicely brought up child, taking great care to place her knife and fork side by side when she had finished. Sometimes she would sit and dream, and Alan would have to urge her to finish what was on her plate. Now and again it seemed as if she were trying to follow their talk but found it too great an effort, and usually when she spoke it was to say something which had no bearing

on what they had been saying. Once she remarked, suddenly :

"You came in crying and your poor little knee was cut. You would go running down the gravel path, and you used to stumble. When I'd washed it and bound it up, you put your arm around my neck and said, 'Poor mummy, did it hurt?'"

Alan laughed, but Mary thought he looked surprised. He said :

"Do you remember the time George got a fish-hook in his finger?"

She seemed a little puzzled.

"Oh," she said, "has that happened yet?"

"Yes," Alan said, "when he was eleven. But I got it out all right, and he was fishing again the next day."

"I'm so glad," she said.

After supper, Alan helped Mary with the dishes. Mrs. Garstin sat in the kitchen while they worked, winding a ball of wool on to a stick and then winding it back again. Alan did the washing up, using soap-flakes extravagantly and piling up the warm and dripping plates so fast that Mary got behind with the drying. She saw that he disliked dish-washing, but that his sense of fairness would not permit him to leave it all to her. Mrs. Garstin was not allowed to help. She dropped things, Mrs. Boles had said; plates and cups slipped from her hands, and the fall and crash frightened and distressed her.

At nine, Mary went upstairs with her to help her get to bed. She needed someone to remind her of what she was there for. Left to herself, she was quite apt to put on her outdoor clothes and come down again, and then she would feel ashamed and sometimes

cry. In the candle-lit room she undressed shyly and with modesty, drawing her nightdress over her head before taking off her underclothes.

"I'm sleeping all alone to-night," she told Mary with satisfaction. "I don't like sharing my room with people. They snore. You wouldn't believe how they snore, those people who were here. Mrs. Boles and Mrs. Boles and Mrs. Boles. They were here too long. They meant to be kind, but they outstayed their welcome."

Mary put a dressing-gown about her shoulders and she sat down in front of her dressing-table, unloosed her hair, which hung below her waist, and waited for Mary to brush it. As she drew the brush down with rhythmical, soothing strokes, Mrs. Garstin said, "It's my bath night, I think."

Knowing that the boiler fire had not been lighted Mary looked dubious. She went to the head of the stairs and called down, "Alan, is it your mother's bath night to-night?"

"No," he answered. "She had one last night. She'll have one to-morrow night."

Mary returned with the message.

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Garstin, "I must have forgotten to put it down in my engagement book. Never mind, to-morrow night is to-night. I only have to go downstairs and up again and eat my three meals and there I am."

"You don't really need clocks and watches, do you?" said Mary.

"Silly things," Mrs. Garstin said, with gentle contempt. "Half the time they aren't telling the truth. I knew a clock once," she said, looking down at her hands, "and it said half-past eleven. Then a thing

happened and the clock went on and on, just as if it hadn't happened."

"What was it that happened?" Mary asked.

"I don't remember. But wasn't it wicked, to lie like that? You see, everything else stopped, everything, but that wicked clock pretended it hadn't, and it went on and on and on and on. . . ."

"*That* happened," thought Mary. "What Alan is going to tell me to-night." And she said firmly, "There, I've brushed your hair forty times. You have lovely hair. It must have been wonderful when you were a girl."

". . . And on and on and on," continued Mrs. Garstin and stopped. "I won," she said and looked at Mary mischievously.

When she was in bed and the candles blown out and the matches taken away for safety, as Mrs. Boles had instructed, Mary went downstairs.

"Alan," she said. She closed the door and sat down close to the table in one of the small chairs, and rested her elbows on it. "Alan, no one who has a sense of humour can be quite . . . you know what I mean . . . can they? She has a sense of humour."

"I know she has," he said, and put aside the evening paper.

"Couldn't something more be done for her?"

"They did what they could. They said she'd never be any better. And in the home she just cried all day long."

"But oughtn't we try again?"

He got up and went to a corner cupboard which he opened and from which he took a bottle of stout and two mugs. He filled one and was about to fill the other when Mary said:

"I don't think I like stout."

"It's good for you," he said. "I want to see you put some fat on those bones."

"Am I so very thin?"

"Too thin. And you'll be working hard here."

"So far," she said, "I'm feeling very well."

"Well, thank the Lord for that. You'll need to be."

"Alan, couldn't we get someone just to see her again? Living with a person all the time one may not notice changes and improvements."

"If there's any improvement," he said, "it's because she's with her family, and not in a home."

"Are you so sure?"

"Dead sure."

"You're so sure about everything," she protested.

"Couldn't you be mistaken?"

"I could, but I'm not." He offered her a cigarette.

"I'm not supposed to smoke," she said.

"That's right, I forgot. You're a sensible girl. Well, look," he said, lighting a cigarette himself, "I'm going to tell you the whole story, from the beginning. Are you all right there? It'll take some time."

She nodded, and said, "I've been looking forward to this ever since you first told me."

"In a way I have, too, and in a way I haven't. This is how it was.

"My father was a doctor named Giles Garstin. He was born in Ripon. His mother was a Scotswoman, from Perth, and clever. His father was a veterinary surgeon and a good one, but he had no head for business, and she looked after the house and his accounts and saw that he kept his appointments. My father made up his mind that he was going to be a doctor when he was ten, and he stuck to it. They pinched and

saved to get him the right sort of education and the best possible training. He was a bright lad and when he was seventeen he went to Edinburgh, and he got his degree there. He was one of those lucky people who really love their profession. I'm another. He was so keen on it that he never wanted a holiday from it."

"I was like that, too," Mary said.

He nodded and went on. "He had his bit of fun at the University from all accounts, and he was no saint, but he never seemed to feel the need of time off from work. He wanted to start practising at the earliest possible moment and he wanted to practise in Ripon so as to be with his parents. His dad retired about that time and when my father returned to Ripon as assistant to old Dr. Seaton, it was a great day for them. Things went along pretty well till my grandmother was taken ill and died, and then it seemed that my grandfather just couldn't make up his mind to live without her, for he followed her in about a year. After that my father felt there was nothing to tie him to Ripon, and he thought it would be good for him to make a change. So when he got a chance to buy a practice in a small town about forty miles from York, he decided to take it. And he had been there about two years when he met my mother. That was in January, 1914. According to him he'd always intended to marry when he was thirty, but he was thirty-three when they met.

"She was a girl from these parts, from near Calne. Her father was an inspector of schools, and she had a sister younger than herself. Their father was a gentle, unworldly sort of chap who'd married, rather late in life, a good-looking, flighty, red-haired woman who

only lived with him for five or six years and then fell in love, with a Canadian. They went off to Canada together and my grandfather divorced her after a bit so that she could marry. I believe she's living somewhere in Manitoba, and has a second family. The two girls were devoted to their father and they tried to make it up to him for having been deserted by their mother. My mother, as soon as she left school, kept house for him and for her kid sister, and when she wasn't cooking or sewing or doing housework, she read and studied and thought about the stage. She had an astonishing memory; she could memorise whole plays and she could recite Shakespeare by the hour. Every one of Shakespeare's characters was alive for her, a lot more alive, she used to say, than the people round about.

"When she was twenty-one or two she was asked to take part in some private theatricals at a big house in the district. I forget who it belonged to, Lord Somebody-or-other, and they were getting up a play for charity. She'd already done quite a bit of acting. It just happened that one of the guests in the house was a theatrical man from London, and he thought my mother had a talent that oughtn't to be wasted on a country village. He talked to her and he talked to my grandfather and he said that if she'd come to London he'd give her a small part in some play he was putting on. Well, he seemed a very decent chap, and my grandfather didn't want to stand in her way. My mother was wild to go. The hardest thing she had to do was to make up her mind to leave him and her sister, who was about eighteen at that time. The long and the short of it is that she went, and she did well, and when that play came to an end she got another small part, and then another, and she was able to keep herself and

sometimes send a bit home to help with the house-keeping. She must have been about the prettiest thing you could hope to see, but she was dead serious about acting and the stage and she lived quietly and worked hard and went on studying. But it was always her dream to act in Shakespeare plays, and at last she got her chance with a Repertory company, and one day found herself in York playing the part of Celia in 'As You Like It.'

"My father had heard about this company and he'd decided he'd spend a night or two in York and go to the play. He went, and he saw my mother and he went clean daft about her. There's no other word for it. He got an introduction somehow and from that time on there was only one woman in the world for him. He was a good-looking chap, a bit shorter than I am, but well set-up. When he knew what he wanted he wasted no time about it. She didn't want to give up the stage and I don't blame her, but she fell in love with him, and that was that. I don't believe two people ever loved each other more than those two did. They didn't want to be with anybody but each other. They married, and he took her to live in Moreland Castle, which was the name of the village where he lived.

"I've said my father was a good-looking chap. He was clever, besides, and he hadn't lived in Moreland Castle for two years without making some women friends. One of them, a widow of about his age with a bit of money, was set on marrying him, but there was something about her he didn't like, and he'd made it clear to her that if he married anyone, it wouldn't be her, but maybe she couldn't make herself believe it. When he came back with my mother, this woman was sort of stunned. It nearly knocked her silly. She

couldn't forgive him for marrying someone younger than she was and beautiful, and an actress. That last was the worst of all. She worked up a campaign of hate against my mother, a sort of war of whispers. My mother soon knew about it, but she was too happy to take it seriously and when I came along she was too busy. I was born at the end of that same year.

"I've said they loved each other, and they were happy, really happy, as long as they were together, but in the summer of 1915 my father went to France, to a field hospital, and he was there till the end of the war, just coming home occasionally, on leave. It must have been terribly lonely for her. The widow had done her work well, and my mother saw very few people and those few weren't very congenial. It couldn't have been much fun for her, and she was thankful to have her father and sister come and stay with her whenever they could, but a lot of the time she'd get very depressed.

"Everything was all right when my father came back again, and for some time things went along smoothly enough. Then she had a child, a girl, and it was born dead, and she minded that terribly. The loneliness began to get on her nerves, and she tried to persuade my father to go south, even perhaps to London, but though he talked about it, he was a Yorkshireman and he couldn't seem to make up his mind to leave Yorkshire. During consulting hours he never had a minute to himself and the rest of the time he was out on his rounds. The only time they had together was a couple of hours in the evening or an occasional Sunday.

"Now this other chap comes into the story. He and his wife had lately come there to live in a house just down the road a little way. He was agent for a big estate near by, a well educated chap who'd had money

and a place of his own once and lost had them through speculation. My mother liked talking to him. He was one of those people you only half-way trust but he was good company and he was married to a woman who was older than he was and no companion to him at all. My mother tried to make a friend of her, but the widow saw to it that the friendship didn't get very far. Our house was on the way to the estate, and this chap took to dropping in. He'd throw his horse's bridle over the gate post and come in for a chat. He wasn't altogether to my mother's liking, but he could make her laugh, and she saw no harm in it. Neither did my father, but presently he found out that people were talking and he told her that perhaps she'd better not let him come there so often. She passed the word on, but this chap kept on making excuses for coming, sometimes when my father was there but sometimes when he wasn't. Once I remember being taken to York by my mother, and he found out somehow and got on the same train both going and coming. Pretty soon she saw she'd have to have it out with him, and she did. She said, very plainly, that he wasn't to come to the house again unless he brought his wife with him.

"There was a sort of devil in this chap. He'd have gone on quite happily and peaceably if there'd been no opposition, but he was one of those people who want a thing all the more if it's out of their reach. When he found that he wasn't to see her any more, he lost his head. Of course he'd fallen in love with her in his own way, and now he simply couldn't believe that when she said 'Don't come here again,' she meant it. He hung around and tried to meet her when she took me out for walks, and he began to make a pretty good nuisance of himself. He began to drink, too,

and he told his wife that he was in love with my mother and didn't care if the whole world knew it. That set the village buzzing. What with one thing and another, my father decided that perhaps it was time to look out for another practice somewhere else.

"Well, one night this chap saw my father leave the house in his car to go to someone who'd been taken seriously ill. It was about eleven o'clock at night and as soon as the car had gone he came and knocked on our door. I was in bed, upstairs, and it woke me up. My mother told him to go away, but he said he'd got to talk to her, and that if she didn't let him in he'd stand there banging on the door all night. Finally she opened the door, thinking that if she talked to him quietly he'd go home. But he'd had a lot to drink, and he was in no mood to go. My mother got frightened and she ordered him out. I heard her. I got out of bed and started to come downstairs. I felt I wanted to be there to protect her. They'd told me she was going to have a baby, though I don't think she showed it much. I was at the head of the stairs when he saw me. He rushed up swearing at me, pushed me into my bedroom and locked the door. That made my mother wild, and she went for him. They struggled, and he had his arms around her and that long hair of hers had tumbled down when my father, who'd forgotten something, opened the door. God knows what he thought. Anyhow, he saw red, and he didn't stop to ask any questions. There was a stick in the hall that some patient had given him, for a joke, to take out on his rounds at night. It had a weight in it. He snatched it up and gave the chap one single blow on the head with it. He went down like a log. My father was very strong, and he'd hit harder than he'd

realised. When he saw what he'd done, he rang up the police. He told them what had happened. My mother just sat with a white face, unable to speak. They couldn't get a word out of her, neither my father nor the police. Then she fainted, and in the middle of it all George began to make his appearance, two months before his time."

He stopped and Mary put her hands over her face. "Oh, the poor things!" she cried, "the poor things!"

"It couldn't have been much worse," he said. "The trial came on at the next Assizes and my father got ten years. Ten years! That was ruin for him, and ruin for him was ruin for her. It broke her up completely. They had to take George away from her. Later they took me away, though I fought like a wild-cat to stay with her. They put her into a home. I don't know what would have happened to us if it hadn't been for her sister. She was a brick, Aunt Esther was. She had no kids of her own, and though she was married, her marriage had turned out badly. So she bought this cottage, and brought us here to live.

"Three times a year, until he died, I was taken to see my father. My mother never saw him again. Her mind just emptied itself of the whole thing. Then my aunt and I decided that she'd better come and live with us, as she was getting no better, and spent her days in the home crying, or in a melancholy sort of daze. After she came here she was much happier, in fact I sometimes think she is happy, in a childish sort of way. Her health's been better, too. Dr. Williams comes about once every two weeks to have a look at her. He says we're doing the best for her that could be done.

"Well, to end the story, as soon as I left school I went

to some engineering works outside Reading. I knew I wanted to be an electrical engineer from the time I was nine. I used to get home about once a fortnight, on Saturdays. Then this place near Devizes opened up, and I came home and got a job there, working on electrical equipment for aeroplanes. It's all a bit hush-hush. I get good pay, four fifty a year. Next year it'll be better, they tell me. But if there's a war, I'll go if I can. She has a little annuity, forty pounds a year. The cottage belongs to us, there's no rent to pay, and there'd be my allowance, as well, if I did go."

"What about me?" she asked.

"Could you stick it?"

"I don't know."

"Could you if I stayed?"

"Yes."

He got up and went to the window and stood looking out. The lustreless moon, seen from the lighted room, looked like a poor coin travelling the sky. He turned back to her.

"When I first saw you," he said, "I thought, 'someone like her would be good for her.' My aunt's a grand woman, but bustling, hearty; big here——" he touched his chest—"and big here," and he dropped his hands behind him. "A grand woman, but not the person for anyone like her. You're different. It's a lot to ask, but if sometimes you could read some poetry to her; if maybe we could get a small piano and you could play. . . . I used to try reading Shakespeare aloud to her, but I'm no good at it. He's too big for me, and when I came to something I like I get a lump in my throat. George can't; anyway, his voice is breaking."

"I'd like to try," she said. "Could we get a piano?"

"I'll get one. It could go against that wall."

"There's something so sweet about her," Mary said. "And sometimes to-day I felt she was laughing at me. Only I must remember not to speak about death."

"She was remembering things to-night," he said. "That bit about my knee . . . and the fish-hook in George's finger—she remembered that in a way, only she was sort of mixed about time."

He took up a candle and lighted it for her.

"I'll wait up for George. And I'll get breakfast to-morrow. You have a lie-in. You look tired."

"No," she said. "I want to get breakfast." Standing there, she idly curved her hand around the lighted candle flame. The seams and scars showed vividly. "Look," she said, interested. "I've never seen it like that before."

"When'll it be your turn to talk?" he asked.

She glanced at him in surprise, and then understood.

"I'd almost forgotten I had a story to tell."

7

MORE and more, as the days passed, Mary felt that what had happened at Callac le Petit had cut her life in two. It was as though she were living on one side of a great gulf, and all her past lay, too remote for her clear vision, lit only by uncertain gleams, on the farther side. She could think of Letty temperately, as people cease to feel vividly about a danger they have escaped. Her mind could now lightly probe and speculate upon her father's character and ways. She thought of Ivor and Lucille with love but of a muted sort; it glowed warmly but it was like a fire well banked down for the night. It could wait. This strange life that she was living, had, she found, a far from displeasing flavour. There was poetry in its simplicity and in its homely rhythms. There was poetry in Mrs. Garstin's return to childhood and in her wild blue eyes; in Alan's and George's devotion to her; in George's unashamed absorption in the religious life. There was poetry in the neglected, bird-infested garden; in the old quince tree like a mad green fountain blown by conflicting winds, and in the perfumed, yellowing fruit that hung on it; in the chalky downs and in their undulating green mounds and hollows; in the thick, clumped, pillared beechwoods; in the farms and villages.

At night she went to bed tired out; but she woke rested and ready for the day's work. Alan found her a second-hand bicycle and when she could get Mrs. Dykes, a plain, kindly, silent young woman to sit with

Mrs. Garstin for an hour or two, she went off on brief, exploratory journeys. In the evening, when Mrs. Garstin had been put to bed, the three of them turned on the radio very softly and sat close to it, listening to the news. They never turned it on in her presence because it perplexed or frightened her. Often nowadays, Alan came back late from the factory; work was being speeded up and he had to put in a good many hours of overtime. She dared no longer ask him if he had made up his mind to enlist, in the event of war. It now meant too much to her; she clung stubbornly and silently to hope.

On Sunday, September 3rd, Mary gave Mrs. Garstin her sewing and slipped out into the garden, following Alan and George who had taken the radio under the quince tree on the other side of the house. The sunny morning, the soft air full of the scent of grass, the sound of bees in the late clover, were the accompaniment to the announcement of war. George knelt in the long grass, his eyes fixed on his brother. In all material matters he was willing to be guided by him, in spiritual matters he kept his own counsel, or opened his mind only to Mr. Whately. Mary, as she listened, crouched under a bending branch, found herself trying to picture her father, Letty, Lucille and Ivor, all gathered somewhere about their radio, listening, looking at one another. Where would they be? They were not in London, she was sure. Letty had talked of taking a furnished house for the holidays near Walton Heath Golf Club, and she now visualised them in some such drawing-room as she remembered in the past, with windows looking out on a garden stiffly laid out with park-like flower beds, and well kept shrubberies. She imagined Letty saying, "Ivor will be all right at Eton ;

Lucille, you'll have to go to your grandmother, I can't, be bothered with you in London if I'm going to drive an ambulance." And then possibly she would say, turning in triumph to Nelson, "Darling, how right I was to have the basement re-inforced. I told you it would be worth all the money we spent on it." And that group in that house seemed to belong to her, or she to it, far less than this little group here under the quince tree. Would her father and Letty speak of her, she wondered? Probably not. They would consider her behaviour outrageous, lacking in all natural feeling. What would they think if they knew that she was doing the work of the house for the family of a man who had died in prison; that she had taken upon herself the care of a mad woman? What would they think of Alan? That he was on a social level with Eva, the housemaid? Would it occur to her father that but for his uncle, he might have been just such another and possibly less competent young man? Probably not, after living for seventeen years with Letty.

When the announcement came they looked at one another in the green shade, while the branches stirred and rustled above their heads. Then Alan said:

"We mustn't let her know."

"But mightn't someone tell her?" George said.

"Who comes here?" Alan asked, and himself answered, "No one."

"Would it make any impression on her if she did know?" Mary asked. "Wouldn't she soon forget?"

"We can't run the risk," Alan said. He had considered it, and had made up his mind. "It might be a shock. It's hard to say just how much she takes things in. It might be enough to send her right over the border-line."

And Mary saw the truth of this. Mrs. Garstin now wove an uncertain but not too dreadful course between fantasy and fact. If the knowledge of the coming of war should reach her, should penetrate the half-imaginary world in which she so precariously lived, who could tell what the consequences might be?

They put away the radio and George went back to the sitting-room where his mother was. He had been to early communion that morning, and on returning home had got breakfast for them all. Mary had never before encountered a boy whose chief pre-occupation was his religion, and who was preparing to dedicate his life to the acquiring of true religious humility. George's character fascinated her, but she was so unsure of her own ground and of his that she approached the subject of religion with extreme diffidence. "Some day," she thought, "perhaps he will talk to me." Even in the short time she had been there she could see how his character was already changing and developing, as if he were sloughing off his old skin and putting on a new one. He did his household tasks quietly and efficiently and without any of Alan's quick impatience. It seemed almost as if he loved them. Now he took it upon himself to spend the morning with his mother, leaving her and Alan to do whatever they pleased, and with one accord they walked together to the front gate, out into the lane, and down towards the village, though so slowly that it was clear they would not get very far. Now that there was no further doubt that it was war, Mary could no longer refrain from speaking about Alan's plans. She tried, in her own mind, various ways of opening the subject and at last said, hoping she had chosen the best:

"I've been wondering how you'll explain your

absence to her, if you go. She'll miss you terribly. She always knows, without being told, when it's time for you to come home. She sits listening."

"We could tell her I'd gone North to another factory, I suppose, and keep on telling her," he said. "I've been thinking a lot about her—and about you. You'll have George here. The lad's growing up; he'll be company for you, if I go. It'll be lonely, I know. But if you could stick it for even six months . . . well, you know how grateful I'd be."

"Why six months?" she asked, startled. "How would things be different at the end of six months?" She had forgotten they had always had six months in mind. The time now seemed to her arbitrary; brutally short.

"I don't say they would be, but with a bit of luck I might find some middle-aged woman, a widow maybe, who'd look on this as her home. I keep putting advertisements in the local paper from time to time."

"Oh," she said. Then, after a pause, "I thought I was doing better. I hoped you were satisfied with me."

A little roughly he said:

"The trouble is, I don't think I ought to let you stay, even if you'd be willing. Your health's better; what's to keep you from taking a proper sort of job somewhere, where you'd be with the sort of people you're used to?"

She answered, speaking carefully and choosing her words:

"Yes, it's true that my health's been better, but perhaps that's because I'm living the sort of life I ought to be living; the sort of life that's best for me."

"Well," he said, still roughly, "remember I don't know much about you. I still don't know why you tried to drown yourself."

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

"There's never any time," she told him. "In the evenings, George is there, and on Sundays we're with her, or busy about the house. It isn't that I've wanted to avoid telling you."

"Are you sure about that?" he asked.

She didn't reply at once. Then, trying to seize the elusive truth about herself, she answered:

"Perhaps I've been ashamed to tell you. It's all real enough in my mind, and my reasons seemed good ones at the time, but they don't seem so good now."

"I'll take you on the motor bike to the top of Farwell Down this afternoon," he said. "No one will interrupt us there and you can get it off your chest."

"All right," she agreed, and half turned about. "I ought to go back now, I have things to do in the house."

He saw that her lips were quivering; her face looked as if it had been sharply hit.

"What's the matter?" he asked brusquely, not needing to be told.

"You seem as anxious now to get rid of me as you were to get me here."

"That's nonsense. I don't want you to go. Why should I? I was thinking of you."

"Oh," she cried, desperately, "what do I matter? Why aren't we talking about the war instead of about me? When will the bombing start? Perhaps they're bombing London now. Why talk about me?" She began to walk away from him, but he caught her wrist and she had to stand still, her face averted.

"Wait. The most important thing for you and me at this moment is to get our personal affairs straightened out. Wars come and wars go. Human beings have got to live as best they can."

She made no answer. This man, she thought, this

man is wiser than I am. Let him decide everything. Let him decide.

He went on: "About what I told them when we got back. If it would make things any easier for you, we could get married. Now or later. Whenever you like."

She looked at him then, as if she longed to see into his heart. But he was not opening that for her yet. All she saw was a young man in an old sweater she had been meaning to mend, when she had time, pulled and torn here and there by thorns and brambles; a young man in a faded shirt with a frayed collar, and trousers that were patched and torn; with a blunt-featured, intelligent, healthy face and rough fair hair; honest, level eyes and a sullen mouth; sullen when it was not smiling, and it was not smiling now.

"Would it make things easier for us?" she asked, frightened, and trying not to show it.

"It might."

"Well then, why not?" she asked, her heart beating faster.

"All right," he said. "Why not? I'm willing if you are."

She saw her life as balanced delicately, precariously, upon this moment; her precious, once thrown away, all-she-had life. Yet with an almost drunken recklessness she said, in an anguish to finish, to settle, to decide the fate of the thing:

"I'm willing. Whenever you like."

His grasp tightened upon her wrist, and then he dropped it and together they walked, like a couple for ever linked together, for ever to be side by side, towards the cottage. The sun was in their eyes; the elm branches printed, fleetingly, their speckled shadows on

their cheeks and foreheads. Portentously they walked; generations to come seemed to walk with them.

"One will be a musician," thought Mary, already a mother in her thoughts, and drunk with it.

"This isn't a house any girl would jump at," he said, bent on fair dealing. "You know what there is to know, and that makes things easier. But I'll say this. Once I've made up my mind to get married—and I have—I'll make a fairly good sort of husband. I like you, we get along all right. We'll make a go of it."

"Then would you stay here?" she pressed him. "Would you stay and not join up?"

Walking in step with her, wanting her to play fair, absolutely fair; on the look-out for feminine tricks, he said:

"No bargaining. I don't know. You'll have to take that risk. I've got a funny sort of brain, it seems; I can get the hang of this new electrical stuff" (he never gave it a name), "and I can teach other people. It all makes sense to me. And I've got some ideas of my own, as well. Maybe they won't let me go. I don't know. You may find yourself married to a soldier, or to a chap that stays behind to work at a factory. Whatever happens, you won't be worse off married to me than to a lot of other chaps. That's all I can tell you."

They heard the gate at the top of the lane open and shut, and saw Betty Hobday coming through it wheeling her bicycle, dressed in Sunday suit, bright blouse and flowered scarf. "Let's get inside our own gate before she comes," he said. "She'll ask a lot of questions, and I don't want to answer them now."

They hastened their steps, and the girl passed the gate with a "Hello!" and a wave of the hand. She

had been away holidaying, and was just back, and Mary had not yet spoken to her.

"What do you think of the news?" she called out.

"I expected it," Alan said.

"Dad says it'll last three years, like the last one."

"Five more likely," Alan called after her. She got on her bicycle and went free-wheeling down the lane, out of sight.

"That was a bit of luck," he said.

They walked up the brick path towards the front door.

"If we marry," he said, "it'll be just you and me, the way my father and mother were. It's the only way to be, I think, when you're married."

"You'd have to love me," she said, with a new freedom, "before we could be like that."

"Well," he said, "that'll come. If I hadn't liked you, I'd have turned you over to the police in Callac le Petit, and told them to find your father. If you hadn't liked me, you wouldn't have come here."

"I like you all right," she said, a little breathless.

Mrs. Garstin saw them from the open window.

"I need you," she called out to them. "I need you, to tell you something."

"We're just coming," Mary answered, and they went into the clean little house that was their home, and was to be their home.

George was lying on the sofa, reading. His bare knees were drawn up, his hair, fairer than Alan's, was in disorder, his shirt was open at the neck, his sleeves were rolled up above his lean brown elbows. He did not know they were there. He was reading Gore's "Orders and Unity." Mrs. Garstin had arranged all her bits of material on the red table cover according to some plan of her own.

"Alan," she said and beckoned. He went to her and put an arm about her.

"What is it you want to tell us?" he asked.

"Mary," she said, her loose, rolling blue eyes focusing upon her briefly. Then she inclined her head towards the sofa. "George."

George sprang up, aware of them now, and came to the table, blinking.

"Now," said Mrs. Garstin, and folded her hands in front of her. "In a room, upstairs, in a house, oh, an old house, with old creaking stairs. No one slept in that room. Once, when I was naughty, they put me in there until I was good again. There was a pair of scissors in a drawer. So, while I was becoming good again, I took the scissors out, and I looked for something to cut. It was a great big bed, with posts, and the bed cover was so pretty. I went snip, snip, with those scissors, cutting the pieces out to make dresses for my dolls. All the prettiest pieces I cut out. And when they came in to see if I was good, oh, how angry they were! And my Grannie cried. Yes, she put her head down on the bed and she cried. So then I knew I had done a wicked, wicked thing, and I cried too. So they didn't punish me very much, but they made me stand beside my Grannie learning some verses from the Bible while she sewed the pieces back again. But they never looked so nice. The cover was spoilt. Wasn't it dreadful?"

"Well," said Alan, "I never heard that story before. It must have been when you were a little girl visiting your Grannie in Chippenham."

Mrs. Garstin nodded, looking very serious, her lips pouted like a child's.

"So," she said, "I want to make her a new one,

with these pieces. A nice new cover. May I, please?"

"Oh yes," cried Mary. "We'll help you. A lovely new patchwork quilt."

"For a surprise, for my Granny. On her birthday. Only," and she knitted her brows, "I don't know which day it is."

"Why not Christmas, Mum?" asked George, in his uncertain voice, now croak, now boyish treble.

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Garstin cried. "Of course. We'll take it to her for Christmas. So now it's all settled. I'd forgotten Christmas."

"I had a nurse once," Mary said eagerly, "who used to work on one. You cut out little six-sided pieces of cardboard, and sew the pieces over them."

"Well," Alan said, "let's get on with it. Hunt for some cardboard, George."

George produced some, and Alan, with a rule, neatly drew and cut out a six-sided pattern, and then began cutting out others. Mrs. Garstin watched, excited and pleased. Mary took one of the pieces of material, folded it around the cardboard, and drawing a chair close to Mrs. Garstin's, said:

"See, this is how you do it."

"This is a very important day," Mrs. Garstin said, looking from one to the other. "You must mark it on your calendars. The day we began the bed-cover for Granny."

"Don't worry, Mum," George said, "we'll remember to-day."

"The day the war began," thought Mary; "the day I said I'd marry Alan; the day we began the patchwork quilt." And her eye caught Alan's, and he smiled, and she prayed, silently, with an aching heart:

"Oh, God, let him not go to the war. Oh, God, let it be over *soon*. Oh, God, help us all."

George was thinking his own private thoughts.

"September 3rd," he said to himself. "This morning for the first time I understood the meaning of Communion. For the very first time."

They stayed on the top of Farwell Down till the sun went down. She had told her story, lying on her coat, on the turf, with Alan beside her, smoking and asking an occasional question. Lapwings had cried and wheeled above their heads, flying this way and that on their supple, bending, frantic wings; larks had climbed the sky and sung and dropped to earth, clouds had threatened rain and dispersed, and now those that were left had arranged themselves in the west, to be set in flames by the sunset.

"Oh," Mary cried hopelessly, at the end of it all, "how can one person ever tell another anything? How can I make you see what the world looked like to me then; how can I explain my despair and disgust and loneliness?"

"I can see," he said, "why you felt as you did. I can see why you'd come to the end of your tether. Just one thing added to another. Mind you," he said, and she had never liked the touch of Yorkshire in his speech better, "I'm not excusing what you did. I think you were pretty silly; but you were young, and there was your bad health. They ought to have told you that you'd outgrow it. That's what you're doing now—outgrowing it. And you're away from them all, and that's a big help. But you don't come out of it too badly. If I were you, I'd just forget it. It's all past and done with. Forget it. You don't have to live

with Letty any more. Let your father do that. He chose her. You don't even have to hate her any more. One of these days she'll get her life all muddled up. You can begin feeling sorry for her now; it'll make you feel better. As for your father, I can't see that he's at all a bad sort of chap. The chances are I'd understand him; I could get along with him if we talked about things we both knew about. He likes getting his own way and he's up against something in Letty, and he knows it. So, as he can't bully her he bullies his children. And that chap, Walsh. He never wanted to marry you; you're not his sort. Letty's more his sort. He liked giving you some pleasure. That's human. It made him feel like Father Christmas; made him feel 'What a kind, generous sort of chap I am!' People enjoy that, till they get tired of it. Letty didn't get much change out of him, I'll be bound. He wasn't in love with her; you'd no need to feel jealous. They were jussy a couple of animals, behaving the way animals—and humans—do behave. That's the way I look at it. As for that Miss Cotter, you've got her all wrong, and her friend, too. The thing doesn't hang together. There's some mistake somewhere, and I think you treated them both pretty shabbily. Still, I may be wrong. You expected too much. People like you, people who care a lot for poetry and music and nature and all, they're the ones that usually get the thick end of it. And that life you were living, and that house you lived in, they weren't any good to you. Well, they're behind you, you don't have to go back to them. I'm not a conceited sort of chap, but I think I can make you happier than you were there."

She asked if she had any right to expect happiness, after what she had done.

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"Forget it, I tell you. Don't keep going back to it. You can't undo it, and if I were you I wouldn't want to. You weren't meant to die that way. When I wrote our names in the sand, I had a pretty good idea that things would turn out like this. There we were, needing each other; needing each other like hell." He rolled over and got to his feet. "Get up," he said, and holding out his hand to her he pulled her up. Then he put his arms around her and said: "The only person whose head I'd like to break is that old man's." He smiled. "Now you can start forgetting all the silly things you've ever done."

He kissed her several times, tenderly, without passion.

"You're such a kid in a lot of ways," he said, releasing her.

"Oh," she whispered, ashamed, "am I? Then teach me to grow up."

"All in good time. Are you going to try to be happy with me?"

"I shall be happy with you."

"It might turn out pretty well," he said, picking up her coat. "It just might."

As they got on the motor cycle he turned his head to say:

"There's something I ought to have told you. There's no insanity in my family, apart from her, and that was shock. If you'd like to talk it over with Dr. Williams, though, I'd be glad."

"I'm not worried about that," she answered.

"O.K.," he said, starting the engine, and they went down the chalky, rutted track between the fold of the downs.

8

THE first winter passed in an unreal and precarious calm. Mary thought that she was like a toy ship in a glass bottle, which, though tossed by the waves, remains intact and undisturbed in its safe little vacuum. She could not leave the house, except for an occasional hour or so. She rarely went to the village, never went to church, saw almost no one. The little family had always been isolated; now that the war had come and the already busy farmers and villagers had taken on new duties, they became still more isolated. Except for the occasional visits of Mr. Whately or Dr. Williams, she spoke to no one except Mrs. Garstin, Alan and George, and, now and again, Emily Dykes, or Betty Hobday, who now brought the milk each morning. Alan did any necessary shopping on his way home from the factory, and the Co-operative Stores in Burnley delivered groceries, meat and vegetables once a week. Books, bought by some of the money she had obtained from the sale of the ring, came from London, and Alan put up new shelves. A small, second-hand, upright piano was hired in Devizes and was delivered one wet morning when the lane was deep in mud and ruts. It made the little sitting-room still smaller, but Mary was grateful for it, for Mrs. Garstin would sit listening as long as she would play. Sometimes she sang, tonelessly, a thing that was hard for Mary to bear.

On her good days, Mrs. Garstin had a sort of childish brightness and gaiety that made her an unpredictable but lovable companion, but there were other days, hard

to account for, when she was given over to melancholy and often to tears. On these days, music was the only medicine for her distress; nothing else could soothe or comfort her. At times it seemed that she pondered her own bewildered state, trying to match old memories, which she now seemed able to recall with growing frequency, with present circumstances. Sometimes Alan said he feared that she might "fish up"—as he put it—some piece of her past that would shock or unsettle her anew. If he could have guarded against it, he would, but it was beyond his or anyone's control.

Mary had spent over two months there before she knew, beyond any doubt, that she was in love with Alan. It happened on a night when the roads were icy and the ruts in the lane had a cutting edge that hurt the feet that stumbled against them. She drew the curtains, threw wood on the fire, cooked the supper with Mrs. Garstin sitting in the kitchen sewing her bits of material for the patchwork quilt, while George studied in the sitting-room. Half-past six came and Alan had not returned, then seven, then half-past, then eight. She gave George and Mrs. Garstin their suppers, kept her own and Alan's hot, and put Mrs. Garstin to bed. She went to the front door, looked out and listened. George came out and stood beside her.

"I'm worried," she said. "He didn't expect to stay late to-night. It's freezing hard, too."

"He'll be all right," George said.

"What makes you say that?" she asked, curious, and wanting to share his conviction. "Is it faith, or do you just not believe that anything could happen to him?"

"Both," said George, and added, "It's faith I think, mostly."

"I wish I had it," she said.

All about them was silence, bare branches and a sky of stars angrily bright. Suppose something has happened to him, she thought, and a great emptiness opened before her feet, a blankness and emptiness that appalled her. She touched the boy's arm, she had to feel there was someone close to her; her fear became enormous, unreasonable, unreasoning. Her whole being strained to draw out of the night and the silence the distant sound of the motor cycle, and in a panic she prayed, forming the words for her inner ear: "Oh God! Let him come; let him come soon! Let him be all right!"

"You'll get cold," George said, and tried to draw her in, but she said: "No, let me stay. I want to listen." At last she was driven indoors by the icy air, and knelt by the fire, warming her hands and shivering. How would they know if something had happened? Who would tell them? How would they hear?

"He's always careful when the roads are bad," George said, looking at her with friendly pity. "Why don't you eat something? It's worse when you're hungry."

"I can't eat," she said, "when I'm worried."

"What would you do if he went to the war?"

"Heaven knows," she said.

She put on a coat and once more stood on the little porch, listening. Still no sound. After a while she went in again, and suddenly a crescendo of uneven bursts as the motor cycle bumped over the hard ruts, shattered the night's stillness. She flew to the door, ran out, crying "Oh Alan, why are you so late?" as he wheeled the motor cycle into the shed. He said nothing, seemed just as usual, closed the door of the shed and then turned to her.

"What are you so excited about? I had trouble with the headlight, that's all."

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

She put her arms about him almost crying with relief.

"Oh God! I'm so glad you're here!"

"What's all the fuss about?" But he spoke tenderly. "You're getting fond of me, I believe."

"Fond!" she cried out, but keeping her voice low.

"Alan, I'd die if anything happened to you."

"Not you," he said, keeping an arm about her, holding her to his side.

"I would, I would!"

On the porch he kissed her. "You're as cold as a frog. You mustn't worry like this."

"Alan," she whispered, clinging to him, "marry me soon."

"Once I'm your husband you'll stop worrying about me, is that it?"

"I'll have a better right to worry. Alan, I mean it; marry me. I'm sick of not being married to you." She shook him. "I'm sick of it, I tell you."

"I'm pretty sick of it myself."

"Well, why don't we? Soon, quickly; what are we waiting for?"

"I've been waiting for just this," he said.

"Well, to-night I knew."

"Right, I'll put the matter in hand." He patted her shoulder. "Where's George?"

"Inside."

He opened the door and went in, and took off his leather coat. George came out of the sitting-room.

"Hello, lad!"

"Hello! What kept you?" the boy asked.

"Headlight trouble. And I had to go slow; there's ice on the roads."

"Your supper'll be ready in one minute if you want

to wash," Mary said, flying about. "I haven't had mine yet. I waited."

"You shouldn't have done that."

She put the supper on the table, beside the lamp.

"I'm happy," she thought; "I'm happy! Here he is. Now it's all right with my world. It's all I want; to have him here. Now I know."

George waited till they'd had their supper and then went up to bed. Alan helped her wash up, then they went back to the sitting-room. He sat on the sofa and patted the place beside him.

"Come here."

Suddenly shy, she went to him and sat down and he took her, to her delight, into his arms. Then he released her to say:

"It's a funny sort of business. George moves out of our room and you move in."

"The sooner the better," she told him, and pushed back her hair and smiled at him, warmly happy.

"What about this time next month?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, with a pang at the thought of thirty days to be got through.

"O.K. In the church; just you and me and George and Dr. Williams and maybe a chap from the factory I'm friendly with, as a second witness."

"Yes," she said. "That's just as I'd like it."

"I'll stop and see Mr. Whately to-morrow on my way home, so if I'm late, don't get all worked up about it. All the same, I'm glad I was late to-night."

"So am I, now."

"You're going to get very fond of me, you know," he said.

She laughed. She said she knew it and asked: "What about you?"

"You needn't worry about that side of it."

Then he said, suddenly:

"Look, I may have to go away some time in the New Year."

She became rigid with dread.

"You mean . . . ?"

"No, not what you think. They want me to go with some other chaps to the South Coast. It's part of a defence plan. I've got to train people to use this new thing we're working on. The thing I can't even talk to you about. We're going to set up more stations. Keep it under your hat. Can you stick it, alone here?"

"Yes," she said. "If I must, of course I can. But if I have to eat my heart out for you, it'll have to be as Mrs. Alan Garstin."

"You'll be that all right before I go."

"Why can't you get a special licence?" she wanted to know. "So that we could be married sooner?"

"What's all the hurry about?"

"They might send you away earlier than you think."

"If they do, I'll get a special licence. Otherwise we'll stick to this day next month. It's my birthday."

"Oh, Alan!" she exclaimed. "Of course it is. So I shan't have to remind you when our wedding anniversary comes round, shall I? Letty was always reminding my father."

"Are you going to write to him?"

"Must I?"

"Why not?"

"Can't I wait till I'm married?"

"I don't like it," he said, "but please yourself."

"We don't want anything from him."

"Only his blessing."

"That," she said, "I'm quite certain he won't give us."

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

"Well, give him a chance. I'll write to him if you like."

"No, I must do it. But I don't want him to come to my wedding. I don't even want Lucille or Ivor. I don't know why, but I don't."

"You needn't have them. But you'll have to see them some day."

"I don't belong in their world any more," she said.

"Look," he said, "I haven't got a world for you. There's only her and George and me. Don't cut yourself off from too much. You might be sorry."

"If you come home every night, there'd be nothing more I'd want."

"You're a silly, infatuated girl."

She laughed happily. "I know I am."

They were married before the end of December, and went to Bath for a five-day honeymoon. As it was during the holidays, George undertook the work of the house aided by Emily Dykes and Betty Hobday, who insisted on lending him a hand. She was not allowed to sit with Mrs. Garstin, who disliked her, and when she came into the room, turned her face to the wall. Her antipathies were strong, as were her affections. She liked Dr. Williams, but Mr. Whately alarmed and upset her. She became nervous when he was there and sometimes covered her eyes with her hands and would not look at him. They wondered if his clerical dress reminded her of her marriage, and set up a troubling train of thought. She never spoke of him. But the knowledge, which came and went, that George was going into the Church, had no displeasing connotations for her, and sometimes she referred to it with pride.

"He looked so handsome," she once said, as if she

had already seen him, "in the pulpit." And she added: "All in white, like an angel."

She thought that Alan and Mary were already married long before the marriage took place, and she once made Mary blush by saying: "You don't look well to-day. I know what it is. I always looked pale when I was expecting them."

They went to Bath in a small car lent to Alan by his friend, Harold Lingest, a tall, dark, silent man who, Alan said, knew as much about short waves as anyone in England. Mary felt a sentimental regret that they were going by car and not on Alan's motor cycle, but Alan did not share it. "As soon as I can afford it," he said, "I'll get a second-hand car and teach you to drive. That may not be till after the war."

"To take her out?" Mary wanted to know.

He looked dubious. "It might not work. It depends on how she gets on. She's a lot better, though."

Mary thought so too, but had feared to say so, for it sounded as if she were praising herself.

She had written to her father and to Lucille, but had decided to withhold both her new name and her address. She had feared that her father might descend upon them, and try to prevent the marriage. She had a nervous dread of some kind of interference. She wanted the marriage to be wholly hers and Alan's, shrank from comment or the mere thought of comment, and even regretted the presence of Alan's friend, but liked him well enough when she met him. When they set out for Bath, through the bleak winter countryside, she felt secure and at peace. She had long ago decided not to send for her clothes, not even for a fur coat she had bought the year before. She would do without it. In Devizes she bought a woollen dress

and a warm coat, the two of them costing just over eight pounds. They left her entirely dependent on Alan, unless she were to sell a brooch given to her by her grandmother, old Mrs. Hallam. It was worth about thirty pounds. Alan urged her to keep it.

January and February passed. In February there was a great ice storm. They breakfasted by lamplight in the bitter cold, early morning, and when the dawn came and they looked out it was a world of glass, brittle and beautiful and dangerous. Mary went wild over fern-fronds ice-encased and blades of grass in glass steeples. She held Alan back to look at the quince tree, a glittering frozen fountain. Before he set out she clasped him again and again begging him to be careful, to be more than careful. She saw him go with anguish. George had already left for school on his bicycle, but George had less far to go, and would not be on the main roads. She was very fond of George, but no danger threatened him. It is the beloved whose life hangs by a thread. The ice lasted for two nights and two days, a miracle, but a wicked miracle, breaking and splitting small saplings and great branches, setting the beechwoods, when the wind got up, clashing and creaking in their efforts to free themselves from their icy armour, and there was havoc everywhere when they walked out on Sunday. Mrs. Garstin was in her room with a bad cold, but she looked out of the window and marvelled, and Mary brought up twigs and a spray of cotoneaster locked in their fantasy of ice.

So far the war had touched Mrs. Garstin's life only in the way the curtains were drawn at night, which irked her, as she liked them to be left undrawn; and in the thick black linings Mary had sewn into them, which she thought ugly. Mary said that it kept out draughts and made the

rooms warmer, and hoped that Mrs. Garstin would have grown accustomed to them before spring came.

Alan was not sent to the South Coast until April. The Finnish-Russian war, magnetic mines, the submarine peril, the muted war on the Continent, the sporadic air raids—these were a distant, never-to-be-alluded-to background to their personal, shut-in, but vivid life. Still Mary would not write to her father to tell him her new name, or where she lived, and when she wrote she took care to send the letters from some other place, preferably London. Examining her own reasons, she knew that it was because of Mrs. Garstin. She would not let any of them come there, or learn of that tragic circumstance. They must not touch it, or touch her new happiness. Had she and Alan been free and alone, it would have been another matter, but her life as it now was, was not for their eyes. It seemed to her that they would finger it, as doubtful buyers finger cloth, and at the thought she writhed in spirit. Lucille's scrutiny she might perhaps have borne; Lucille's was a purer, less tainted gaze: she accepted what she saw, did not compare one set of circumstances with another. Of Ivor she was less sure; already there were the signs of a too great fastidiousness in him; already his desire to live among beautiful things, his passion for *décor* was unboyish, precocious. His mother's drawing-room, with which she was so serenely pleased, was to him a chamber of horrors. No, she could trust none of them—no, not even Lucille, who was, after all, Letty's daughter.

When the parting came, it seemed to her that something that was a living entity was being torn apart. The growing together, the grafting, had been going on as if begun by the most expert of gardeners. There

was nothing, she thought, to hinder it. They were now heartily in love, and within those close four walls, within the tiny, confined circle of their lives, the growth of love was rapid. They had only the world of each other's personalities to explore. Absorbed though Alan was in his work, excitedly absorbed, when he left the factory he left it completely and returned to a young wife whose ready and eager caress was his one joy and recreation. The two single beds were pushed together, the two mattresses exchanged for one large one; Mary sold the brooch and bought new curtains, new covers, installed a hanging cupboard, and contrived with a new-found skill to make the small room a home. Her happiness was so real a thing that her whole look, her whole personality affirmed it. She detested milk, but drank it in great quantities at Alan's request, and soon her skirt bands had to be let out. The hard work no longer tired her; and Mrs. Dykes helped with the cleaning twice a week. Alan would not let her wash and iron more than her own and some of his underwear; the rest he took on his motor cycle to a laundry in Devizes. George sometimes went by bus with one or two companions to Devizes, to the cinema; Mary and Alan never. At night, after Mrs. Garstin had been put to bed, she read aloud to him; if George liked what they were reading, he sometimes listened, but he more often went to bed with a book of his own choice. He seemed certain of his scholarship, and it had been arranged by Mr. Whately that he was to go to a Theological Seminary in the following autumn. What Mary would do then, alone in the house, if Alan were still away, was a problem they dared not face. Without Mrs. Garstin, there would have been no problem; Mary would have followed him. But it never entered their heads to send her away.

Alan had not been gone two weeks before Mary wrote to him to say that they might expect a baby in November. She was so enchanted by the prospect that the added difficulties seemed not to have presented themselves to her. Alan was more aware of them, but said: "Don't worry; we'll manage. If George is away we can put somebody in his room. If he's home, he'll have to sleep in the sitting-room. What we want is a younger Mrs. Boles. You'd better begin looking for one. Ask everybody you see."

She asked, but without result. But so many miracles had happened that she did not greatly concern herself. Something or someone would turn up. Meanwhile the passing of winter and the wonder and delight of knowing herself to be pregnant kept her more than tolerably happy. Alan was not very far away. He would come home for a few days' leave in May, and meanwhile she would have held back the Spring for him if she could, for to experience it without him was a sweet sorrow. But this was not as other Springs had been. She was free now of the dream, free of all the anguish and the longing. The lilacs bloomed, and she felt only delight and never a pang; the quince tree enchanted her with its pale, fragile blossoms. The snowy pear, the first to bloom of all the fruit trees, did not stab her to the heart as in other years. For once, Spring was no cruel anachronism. She moved in step with it.

To safeguard Mrs. Garstin, no newspapers came to the house. She heard of the invasion of Holland and Belgium in her bedroom, her coat over the radio and her head covered by it too, so that no sound might escape. It was a little like watching a stage drama sitting alone in a darkened theatre. She found it hard to believe in its reality.

9

THE house in Hyde Park Square had kept its dignity and its intactness throughout the long years of war. Nothing had gone from it, nothing but cracks from near-by blasts and the soot and soil of London days and nights had been added to it. The furniture in the drawing-room was covered in dust sheets, the pictures removed from the walls and stored in the vast basement, the lamp shades that had reminded Maud Cotter of Burmese temples done in silk and fringe, had been stored away in some cupboard. Upstairs only Nelson's and Letty's bedrooms and bathrooms, Nelson's library and one end of the dining-room were in use. In the basement there were emergency beds for all, including the only two remaining members of the staff—Shaw and Mrs. Regan the cook—to whom, much to everyone's surprise, he had got himself married during the first weeks of the war. Both below stairs and on the top floor were to be found every known contrivance for dealing with incendiary bombs or fires resulting from them, and in one corner of the basement, Letty kept a great tin box full of First Aid appliances.

For two years Nelson had been an Air Raid Warden, at the end of which time he resigned in favour of a younger and less tired man. For nearly a year Letty had driven an ambulance with zest and courage, but her driving in the black-out was erratic, and provided an added risk. It was suggested that her organising ability and skill in directing others were being wasted,

and she presently became head of a large depôt for unpacking and distributing clothes from America and Canada to bombed-out families.

Neither Lucille nor Ivor were allowed to come to London until the lull before the flying bombs, when they came for a visit and were surprised and pleased by the informal way in which their parents now lived. They found them more approachable, less inclined to criticise and censure, and Ivor had occasional talks with his father during which he forgot to stammer and to fix upon him a hypnotised gaze. Letty left her knitting about in the library: there were a few flowers there sometimes, and it was a relief to Ivor that the drawing-room was shut up. He and Lucille agreed that they had never spent a more agreeable week in that house.

But the time soon came when Lucille was considered expendable. She joined the Waafs, and was sent away to a camp in the Midlands. When she got leave she came to London, and demanded and got, a latch key, on the one condition that she did not stay out later than eleven, and slept in the basement. In appearance she much resembled her father. Her straight heavy hair was very dark, and in her uniform she looked thick, solid, even a trifle masculine. She was the despair of Letty, who wondered, irritably, if she had not somehow got the sexes of her children mixed. The graces she had so desired for her daughter were wholly lacking, and the attentions of a hairdresser made the girl, she said, - look quite ridiculous. Only one thing about Lucille now pleased her mother—that she no longer wished or tried to write poetry. Lucille had come to see that her facility for rhyme was a facility for rhyme and nothing more. She wanted to learn to fly; she

wanted to be admired for her daring. She had a vein of lively, coltish humour and a generous nature, and these gained for her a considerable popularity among her fellow Waafs. Nelson was proud of her common sense and her determination to do well. The regimented life, the discipline, the hard work seemed much to her liking. She hoped to see service abroad.

Ivor had decided to join a tank regiment. He thought this might be one of the toughest of jobs, and he chose it for that reason. He selected a branch of the service in which he thought he could reasonably expect to be wounded or killed before fear or boredom drove him to desperation. He had no faith in himself, none in his own courage. It was cruel that he resembled Letty in none of the ways that might have been useful to him. He had much of her charm, none of her self-assurance. He could have done with another skin. The things she said often caused him the sharpest embarrassment, and though he was devoted to her, he had not forgotten that she never intervened to spare him the miseries of those hours wasted on cricket, a game he loathed, or the torture of interminable golf lessons given by a highly paid professional under his father's exasperated eye.

When the four were together there was no communal family feeling; there was never any delight in merely being together, no happy interplay of personalities, no ease, no geniality. Letty's maternal instincts, never strong, had been at their height when Ivor and Lucille were attractive little children in the nursery. Now she said, and said frequently, they were out of her hands; she had done what she could for them and could do no more. It gave her pleasure to know that Ivor admired her, thought her exceptionally pretty, but

she knew that he criticised her too, and her reaction to this was to outdo herself in exacerbating his nerves. ("He ought not to have nerves, at his age.") "Thank God I'm not artistic," she was fond of saying; "thank God I've no temperament." But she took pains to look her most attractive when he was there, and to assume, for him, her spoilt-little-girl airs. As soon as he was in uniform she took immense pride in his appearance. "Just let me be seen out with you now and again, darling. It's all I ask," she pleaded. "It'll be my reward for all the sacrifices I've made for you."

The flying bomb period worried Nelson more than the bombing of '40, '41, and he tried to persuade Letty to leave London, but she wouldn't hear of it. Her nerves were quite unaffected, and she never missed a day at the depôt. When she got back she would want cocktails, and at least three or four times a week people dropped in, as Nelson's supply of gin and whisky seemed without limit. The people who came were mostly men. Among them was the young German refugee from whom she had taken German lessons before the war, and who was now employed by a British Chemical Company. He was a young man of considerable good looks and affability, and had had an English mother. Letty had introduced him to many of her friends, and he had the grace to be grateful and to be undemandingly in love with her. With great solemnity he had confessed this to Nelson, asking him whether, in view of this fact, he ought to deny himself the pleasure of coming there. That, Nelson pointed out, depended entirely on his own behaviour, and he thanked him, somewhat pompously, for his frankness. The young man bored Letty, and Nelson knew it, but it pleased her that he should display, to her other guests,

a chivalrous and unrequited adoration. Another frequent visitor was Ferdinand Walsh, whom Letty had "picked up again," in her own words, and who combined his work at the Bar with an exalted position with the Ministry of Food. Then there were a few of Nelson's friends, Greer Hopkinson among them, and a bevy of American officers whom Letty particularly welcomed because she said they made her feel gay. She held her little court in Nelson's library, and as there were frequently not chairs enough to go round, some of the visitors sat on the floor. More often than not, Nelson failed to get home until after the guests had gone, and sometimes he counted as many as fifteen glasses. Thanks to the generosity of the American officers, Letty was usually able to provide sandwiches or *canapés* as well. She frankly enjoyed her parties; she enjoyed them more, she said, than the dinner-parties she had given before the war. When Nelson cautioned her that his supplies of gin and whisky would not last for ever she said: "Then you must find ways of getting more. These little parties are the only pleasure I have now."

Frequently they dined out at restaurants, and not once, when the flying bombs snored hideously over London and crashed, did she show the slightest nervousness. Imperturbability was the fashion, and Letty was a woman of fashion. She seemed to ignore or not to be able to imagine, the shattered flesh, and when the crashes were close she would laugh and say: "That was a near one!" And there was a fierce excitement in her eyes.

But something had happened between them. He did not love her less, or he told himself that he did not, but she pleased him less. He found more to criticise in her. He was critical of her indifference, of her cool,

unbreakable indifference. Never once, during all the nights of bombing did she come to him to be comforted, or wish him to come to her. And he would long for this; he would feel: "If only she would be human enough to be afraid." "Well, if it hits us, it hits us," she often said, "and we'd far better be killed comfortably in our own beds." He would have liked her to show some emotion when Ivor was called up, but she showed none. She had not got, he surmised, the child she had wanted, if indeed she had ever wanted a child at all.

Only when Mary's letters came did she lose her cool serenity. It made her far angrier than it made him that Mary still gave no address. He would hand the letters to her to read, and after a glance at them, followed by a questioning look at him, she would tear them up viciously and toss them into the waste paper basket. When the news of her marriage came, she said:

"I don't think we need trouble our heads about her any more. She's married someone she's ashamed of, and it's no more than I expected. Nothing would induce me to speak to her again, in any case."

He was silent, and she asked:

"Would you speak to her again?"

"I don't know," he said, heavily, sadly. "What I find it hardest to understand is her running away in the first place. If I knew what made her do that——"

"Disappointment over Ferdinand Walsh," said Letty, who always repeated this formula, "and some sort of shock in Paris, Maud thought. That old man she went about with, you remember. Now she's married some complete bounder and she's ashamed to let us find it out."

"There must have been more to it than that," he said, frowning, and did not see Letty's quick glance of fury.

When letters came, giving them news of the two little boys, Letty was coldly sarcastic.

"Well, she was determined to deprive you of any pleasure you might get out of being a grandfather," she said one day. "Personally, I couldn't care less about it. I can't think why she even bothers to write."

"I ought to have done what I first wanted to do," he said. "I ought to have taken steps to find her in the beginning and bring her back. The French police could have traced her easily enough."

"After that threat in her letter to Maud, I don't see how you could. However," she added, "don't let's talk about her. The very sound of her name irritates me."

"I don't understand it," he persisted. "I'll never understand it. Are you sure, are you absolutely sure, Letty, that there wasn't a quarrel or some disagreement between you?"

She raised her cold grey eyes and looked at him.

"Nelson, I warn you, if you ask me that question again there'll be trouble. I have told you not once but twenty times that there was *no* quarrel, *no* disagreement of any sort."

He said, uneasily, "Something, I meant, that you'd forgotten. That meant nothing to you, but might have meant a lot to her. I can't help feeling. . . ."

They were breakfasting in the alcove in the dining-room. Letty pushed back her chair and got up.

"I'll be late at the dépôt. For the last time, Nelson, and when I say the last time, I mean it, there was no quarrel and no disagreement. Everything was precisely as usual, as far as she and I were concerned, when she

went to France. If you're going to try to blame me for the vagaries of a stupid, neurotic girl——"

"Letty, Letty," he said, frowning. "Is it necessary to speak of her like that?"

"Why not? She's not dead, is she? And it happens to be true." And she gave him a sweeping, seeing look, as if she were discovering something about him that had been hidden from her before. It was so cold a look that if he had not been pouring out a last cup of coffee it would have told him much.

"When are you going to get your hair seen to?" she asked, in a more wifely tone. "It's showing white at the roots."

"I'm not going to get it seen to," he said. "I'm going to let it get white. I'm sick of the whole business. I ought never have started it."

"Well," she said, more agreeably, "perhaps you're right. It might make you look quite distinguished, now to have white hair." She moved towards the door and then said, over her shoulder, "Try and come back early. There are some people coming in for cocktails, Colonel Everard, among them."

"Is Walsh coming?" he wanted to know.

"Probably. Why?" She turned and faced him, a hand on the door handle.

"Nothing. Only that I think he's here rather often."

"It's your good pre-war whisky that brings him," she said. "Don't imagine it's altogether my *beaux yeux*. Besides, that's why I hoped you were coming home early. He wants to see you."

"What about?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, I think. He just happens to like you."

"I used to like him," said Nelson.

"Why the past tense?"

"I don't know. I can't help feeling that he behaved badly to Mary."

"Rubbish," she cried, and went out, quickly.

Nelson sat on at the breakfast table. He was a grandfather twice over, and he was unable to see his grandsons. He, too, was angry with Mary, at times bitterly angry, but he felt that she had some reason for her behaviour of which he was ignorant. The thing puzzled him; as time went on, it puzzled him more and more. He perceived, from Mary's letters, that she was changing, developing. And she seemed to be extremely happy. It became more and more distressing to him that he was cut off from her. And why did she never speak of Letty, never even refer to her? There was a mystery there; Letty had not told him all the truth.

As he was putting on his coat, the telephone rang and he went to it. To his amazement he heard Maud's voice. She sounded precisely as usual. The robust, good-humoured, warm voice lightened his gloom.

"Well, Mrs. Pierce," he said, jocularly, using, for the first time, her new name, "you could knock me over with something even lighter than a feather. What on earth are you doing over here?"

She had come over in connection with UNRRA, she said. She'd been offered a temporary job at UNRRA headquarters in London and had jumped at it.

"Lowell's so well just now," she said, "that I felt I could safely leave him for a few months. Any news from Mary?"

"A letter this morning, full of talk about the children, but giving no address, as usual."

"Dear, dear!" said Maud. "I was so hoping to see her. I'm staying at the Downshire, as usual."

"Come in for drinks this evening," he suggested. "There are a number of people coming. Then we'll take you out to dinner somewhere."

"Grand," she said. "I'll be there. How's Letty?"

"Very well. Very busy. I don't think you'll see any change in her. I'll give you her telephone number if you'd like to ring her up."

"No," said Maud. "Don't tell her I'm coming. I'll just turn up and give her the surprise of her life."

"Right," he said. "See you later."

"How do you think things are going over there?" she asked. It was September; three months from the invasion of D-day.

"You know as much as I know. Why ask me? I take my views from the newspapers, like anybody else."

"It's all right, Nelson," said Maud, with her laugh; "I'm not trying to pump you."

"Don't be absurd," he said. "I've become a wretched temporary Civil Servant, run off my feet and never taking my nose from the grindstone. I don't know anything about anything. History in the making is a dull business for some of us."

"Well," she said, "I'm feeling pretty cheerful about it, myself," and hung up.

Colonel Everard was the first of Letty's visitors that day. He was admitted by Shaw just after Letty had got home and while she was tidying herself upstairs. He was a tall, slender man of forty-six with a sallow, finely-boned, distinguished face, exceptionally good teeth and an absolute composure of manner that had immediately pleased Letty, who hated a fidgety man.

He had been in Europe for a year and a half, and had already seen much service and been wounded; when he was in London the house in Hyde Park Square became a kind of home to him. In the beginning it was a place where he could laugh, talk, relax, tell his quiet, humorous stories, carry on a gentle flirtation with a pretty woman and forget the war. Letty never discussed the war, never asked him questions, was vividly interested in personalities and any gossip which might come her way, and, or so she made it seem, in the person to whom she was speaking. He had been amused, too, by her trick of belittling herself in a way that only added to her charm.

"Of course I'm the dullest of your English women friends, Rex, and I know it. All these others you go to see chatter intelligently to you about art and music and the drama, or the war, or the negro problem. I only chatter about you and me. Anyway, you know I don't love you for the occasional lipstick or bottle of perfume or tin of tongue, don't you? And at least I give you good, pre-war whisky—or Nelson does."

But later, his visits there assumed a new meaning for him, a new importance and urgency. He found he could not stay away. Nelson seemed a shadowy figure; he was rarely there, and Letty rarely spoke of him. He seemed a detached, aloof, troubled man. Letty's personality, not his, pervaded the big, half-lived-in house. It was easy to ignore Nelson, to minimise his importance, even, at times, to forget him.

Colonel Everard had divorced his wife shortly before coming to Europe, for incompatibility combined with mental cruelty. She was a wealthy Kentuckian and had spent her life with or on horses. When she was

still in her teens this had seemed to him and to others, attractive. By the time she was forty-four it was still her chief interest, but drink, as a hobby, ran it a very close second. She made his home intolerable. Recently he had lost his only son, a boy not yet twenty, who had gone to Canada before Pearl Harbour and joined the R.A.F. His tragedy touched Letty in a way that a tragedy of her own never could. Combined with his good looks, tall figure and romantic charm, she had found that it possessed a most potent appeal for her. Whenever he talked of his home in Maryland, now empty of all but caretakers, she pictured herself there, walking in gardens famous for their alleys of clipped box, directing (and being adored by) his coloured servants, charming the people in similar country houses by a new, fresh and provocative personality.

As she ran downstairs and into the library she was delighted to find that as yet no one else had come to spoil a much desired *tête-à-tête*.

"How lovely!" she cried, going to him with both hands outstretched. "I've got you to myself. I'm glad to see you've poured yourself out a drink."

"I don't feel precisely a stranger in this house," he said, "so don't expect me to act like one. How do you manage to look the way you do after a whole day at the dépôt?"

"It's no secret," she said. "Soap and water. No, don't pour me out a whisky and soda. I think I'll have a gin and lime. What a blessing is drink! You needn't scowl at me. You know very well I've never drunk more than three cocktails at a sitting in my life and never will. No, dear Rex, there are vices nearer to my heart."

His handsome, darkly lashed eyes looked at her with

tender admiration. "Have you really got two grown-up children? I'll believe it when I see them."

"Well, I was married at eighteen. At nineteen I had Lucille. I'm not yet forty."

"I don't suppose," he said, "you've ever been more attractive in your life. Letty, do you love him?"

They sat side by side on Nelson's sofa, and the photograph of Letty in her presentation gown faced them from the writing-table.

"Who? Nelson? My dear, I'm a very good wife."

He laughed a little, a laugh that often accompanied the things he said.

"Just my luck to come over here and meet someone like you. You know very well that I have every intention of marrying again. Why put obstacles in my path by providing yourself with a husband and family?"

"But you must marry again, Rex. You must. And soon."

"I had it in my mind," he said, smiling, "to marry someone who'd put my interests first, and so win my love and gratitude that I'd spend my life putting hers first."

"Are you really that sort of man, Rex?"

"Believe it or not, I'm that sort of man. I'm even the sort of man you once said you hated. I'm sentimental."

"Well then, I must have been thinking of something quite different," Letty said. "For heaven knows I don't hate you."

"Letty, Letty," he said. "Why don't you order me out of the house? Here I sit, on this sofa, breaking one of the Ten Commandments to smithereens, and you don't say a word. It's the first time in my life

I ever coveted another man's wife, and I'm finding it damned painful."

Swiftly, as he was speaking, and in the little tense silence that followed, Letty was reviewing her life. Things in England were not going to be agreeable after the war. Nelson had been talking of selling the house, of taking a flat. Ever since he had lost that bye-election in 1939, she had been wondering what life held in store for her. Lucille had disappointed her; she was certainly not going to be a credit to her or make a good marriage. Ivor's good looks were becoming a handicap to him rather than an asset. At any rate, he showed no sign of making the sort of use of them that she would have made in his place. His friends were people inferior to himself. Far from cultivating those who might be useful to him he collected hangers-on, unfortunates, people of no account. And he would take no advice from her or from his father; he seemed to barricade himself against correction or comment. As for Nelson, she knew he had lost his old, uncritical adoration of her. She felt the presence of doubts, antagonisms. She knew he suspected that she had not told the whole truth about Mary (who had certainly spied on her that night, who had listened for her return, who had guessed something or everything. Judging from that sudden collapse, that sudden illness, she had guessed everything.) Her life, after the war, would be a curtailed, diminished version of her life before the war, and that had only been bearable because she had hoped for better things. Now she saw no hope. It was not enough to be married to a manufacturer of typewriters. He couldn't even understand why, at times, she was bored nearly to frenzy; why, though of course she would never put it into words, she was

grateful for the excitement and danger of the war. No one could say she'd shirked any of it, at any rate.

She had never met a man whose attraction for her was as strong as that of Rex Everard. Her conquest, such as it was, of Ferdinand Walsh had been a triumph of sorts, a very bright feather in her cap, but it was a dusty triumph now. She still admired him, but he was "cagey," cautious, cold, a cold fish. No matter where his search for pleasure and amusement might take him, at the inner core of him was coldness. He had too nice a sense of values, she knew, ever to betray his own interests or put them in a secondary place. Not so Rex Everard. When he looked at her she was frightened lest other people saw in his eyes what she saw. He was ready, enchantingly ready, to give himself away.

Now she was going to end one phase of her life and begin another, and she knew that she was. She had done her best, she could do no more.

"Rex," she said, softly, putting into her voice the music that was never anywhere in her but in her voice, "Rex, be careful, my dear. Don't, don't make things too hard. When you say things like that, a whole new world opens out before me, and it's a world I mustn't even glance at."

He looked at her as though he were seeing her for the first or the last time. Her lashes, he saw, with a new pleasure, were fairer than her hair; they were golden. And the grey of her eyes, he noted, was a *colour*. Could she be nearly forty? The smooth, unwrinkled brow, innocent and lovely, the proud, fierce little nose, these things had magic in them. And he told himself, in agony, that she had a conscience, that she would fight a battle against this new and growing fondness, and win it, and he would be lost, and it would be the end of his dream.

He took her hand and laid it against his cheek. "If I could see you once, just once, walking into my front door, walking right through the house with that funny little walk of yours——"

"You like my walk?" she murmured. "I always got scolded for it. My mother called it a 'follow-me' walk. She always said it would get me into trouble."

"I hope it has," he said laughing gently, and she saw his eyes blur with tears, "and I hope this is it."

With nothing more said, they swayed together. Her arms went up, about his neck. For a few minutes they silently, with deadly, wordless passion, told each other how little the rest of the world mattered to them. When he let her go she saw that he looked heart-broken, anguished.

"Ah, Letty!" he cried. "Letty! Good God! I can't let you go."

"No," she said, her eyes holding his, "no, you can't. You're right."

"Do you by any chance mean that?"

"Darling, I mean exactly that. You can't let me go. I can't let you go. That's final. Leave the rest to me."

The door-bell rang, and she seized her handbag and attended to her face. Then, as Shaw's deliberate tread sounded along the uncarpeted hall, she put her arms, under his, around him, looked up into his eyes, and said, "One more kiss. Quickly."

"I've got to talk to you," he pleaded. "Can't we have an evening out together? Doesn't Nelson ever spend an evening out?"

"I'll arrange that too. Leave it to me."

"Oh, God!" he said, "do I have to stay here and talk to people and drink more of Nelson's whisky? Can't I go?"

"Yes," she said. "Go."

He went out as Ferdinand came in.

"Nice fellow that," Ferdinand said. "What's his hurry? I wanted to talk to him. The Americans, I've just heard, have crossed the German border at Trier."

"He probably knows it. He's got an engagement. Pour yourself out a drink," Letty said. And as he did so, she said, "Ferdinand, Nelson's giving me hell these days about Mary. He's just had a letter from her, telling him all about his grandsons. He thinks I did something to her—or that you did, to make her run away. I'm getting pretty fed up with it all."

"Really?" said Ferdinand. "It seems old history now, all that. Did you and she have a quarrel?"

"No, never. But I never told you—she was awake that night—that first night—when I got home. She heard me come in."

She lighted a cigarette.

"Poor Mary," he said. "She was unfortunate in her step-mother."

"Wasn't she? But seriously, Nelson has suddenly grown suspicious. It has its funny side—as our present relationship is so perfectly innocent."

"My dear Letty, you seduced me before, you're quite capable of doing so again."

"I haven't the slightest wish to. Were you in love with Mary?"

He replied, heartily, "Not a bit. But I was fond of her. A far nicer person than you are, of course. That goes without saying. I remember you thought at the time that I was merely showing her attentions in order to arouse you to a sense of what you might be losing. But, in fact, I was fond of the child."

"Did she think you were in love with her?"

"She may have done."

"Well then, the whole thing's your fault, not mine."

"You should tell Nelson so," said Ferdinand. "He might call me out. I've always wanted to fight a duel."

"You'll never be serious," she said. "Tell me why you've lately begun coming here again. I didn't see you for two whole years."

"Remember I've been bombed out twice. Even one bombing can be counted upon to upset the routine of one's life."

"What a lucky thing you sleep around so much, to borrow an American expression," said Letty. "You probably owe your life to that fact."

"On the contrary," he said. "The first time it happened, I was present, and alone, the second time I was at my mother's house, in the New Forest."

"My dear," she said, "what's wrong? Are you losing your touch?"

There were footsteps once more crossing the hall. It turned out to be two young American officers, one of them accompanied by a pretty English girl whom he said he'd met at a Red Cross dance the night before and thought he'd like to bring in for a drink.

"I don't wonder," said Letty, offering her hand to the girl, and smiling. "You're more than welcome. These parties are becoming altogether too predominantly masculine."

"She works at an American Red Cross hostel," the boy said. "She does a swell job, too."

The room now began to fill up quickly. Letty, looking round, thought there could surely be no more to come when once more she heard the bell. A moment later the door opened and Maud walked in. She stood

looking about her, saw Letty, and the two went quickly to each other and kissed, Letty uttering cries of amazement and delight.

"I can't believe my eyes. Maud, you old wretch, why didn't you let me know? What a trick to play on me! This is my oldest friend, Mrs. Lowell Pierce, just over from Boston. Well, I've certainly had the surprise of my life."

"Dear me," thought Maud. "As a result of the American invasion, Letty now speaks like an American. How adaptable she is!"

It was more than a surprise to Letty, it was something of a shock, although a highly agreeable one, all things considered. (For there was no one who could be more useful, to whom Nelson would more readily turn for comfort.) But she had been writing to Maud of the rigours of war-time London, her letters had been rather full of an unusual self-pity, and now Maud had arrived and found her in the midst of a cocktail party, wearing an anything but "austerity" dress—it was a Maggie Rouff—and looking her best. She was glad that, even as she and Maud greeted each other, a V.I. came ripping through the sky with its hideous snore, and burst within half a mile or less. "Just our way of welcoming you, Maud darling," she said, and she felt that the V.I. had been on her side, had assisted at her party.

Maud looked well, and except that her hair was nearly white, looked no different. Letty thought she had put on a little weight, but perhaps that was the uniform, the cut of which was hardly flattering to maturity. She introduced Maud to Ferdinand and sat them down together on the sofa where she had so recently sat with Rex. Maud's intuition, plus a fragment that remained in her memory, told her that this tall and

interesting-looking barrister was the one Mary had somehow, according to Letty, "bungled things" with. Drawing a bow at a venture, she said:

"You knew Mary, didn't you? Mary Hallam."

"Indeed, yes," said Ferdinand, bending on her his powerful look, great eyebrows and forthright nose. "Oddly enough, Letty and I were speaking of her before you came. Sad that she still keeps her whereabouts a secret."

"She hasn't, to me," said Maud. "She's written to tell me where she is, but I'm only to tell the family at my discretion, and if I feel they should be told. You're a lawyer, advise me. What shall I do?"

"Exactly what she suggests—use your discretion," he said. "She couldn't be in better, or more discreet, hands."

"Well," said Maud, "I won't do anything till I've seen her father, and talked to him. It's an odd position to be placed in. She said that she was anxious for news of them, and if I had any, to let her know. I wrote at once to tell her all was well, so far as I knew. Of course she didn't know then that I was coming over here. I didn't know myself."

"I'm very much interested," said Walsh. "Tell me about her. Do you gather that she's happy?"

"Completely," said Maud. "Completely."

"Then why the mystery?"

"That," said Maud, "she also explained to me, but I can say nothing about it. I can only tell you that it's nothing she need be ashamed of. On the contrary."

"I'm happy to hear it," he said. Then, it seemed, he tired of the subject of Mary, and asked: "Will you be here long? I gather you've come on a mission. It's impossible, nowadays, to avoid war *clichés*, isn't it?"

"It's hardly a mission," Maud said. "I may be here about six months. I promised my husband I wouldn't be away longer. He's something of an invalid."

They talked a little longer, then Letty crossed the room to them.

"Are you talking about Mary?" she asked. "Since you've been here, Maud, I've thought of a new possibility. Perhaps she's been murdered, and her murderer has learnt to copy her handwriting and sends us those letters just to keep us quiet."

"How preposterous you are, Letty!" said Maud. "But you always were. I was just telling Mr. Walsh what I was presently going to tell you, that she's told me where she is. But I'm not to divulge her address except for some very good reason."

To Letty, this was a slap in the face. If Mary had wished to insult her, she could have found no better way. "She'll never have a chance to insult me again," she thought. But she only smiled and said, "Really, Maud? How like her to choose such a devious way of telling us! Ferdinand, you mustn't monopolise Mrs. Pierce. Come over here, Maud, I want some of your compatriots to meet you."

The evening tried Letty almost beyond her endurance. The subjects talked about were Mary and the war, but chiefly Mary. As she got into bed she thought, At last, I shall be rid of the girl, and for ever. It's Mary, and Nelson's suspicions about my behaviour to her that have come between him and me. But for her, this might not have happened. The way he watched Ferdinand and me this afternoon made me almost want to laugh. How like him to be over six years out of

date! I believe it's in his mind that I had an affair with Ferdinand and Mary found it out and left home for good. Well, I did and she did, but it's all old history now. She'll keep her mouth shut, I can be sure of that. How well I remember the first time I saw her. Dark, silent little six-year-old, she used to stare at me and never speak. Who'd think she'd be the cause of our marriage breaking up? Well, one of the causes. Oh Rex, oh Rex! I know just how it will happen, darling. So don't worry. I'll tell Nelson that if he mentions his suspicions about Mary once more, I'll walk out of his house. And he will mention them, and I will walk out. Only I must find somewhere to go. Then I'll admit misconduct, and ask him to divorce me. Oh, Rex, it needn't be more than a year. I don't even feel very sorry for Nelson. He's so good, and such a bore. I understand my father now. Mother was good—oh, so good—and I expect she bored him with her patience and her sweetness. And she thought he had a bad influence on me, and tried to keep us apart. The combination was too much for him. I remember it all so well. Paris! Poor Paris! How I'd love to have gone there with Rex! Or to Venice. Perhaps some day. I must sleep now. He'll be ringing me up at the dépôt, early. He'll want to be assured, all over again, that it's true.

NELSON had said, so pleadingly : " Maud, I'd like you to be here when she comes," that Maud had arranged with Mary to arrive soon after six when her own work would be over for the day. She made her way to Hyde Park Square, thinking : " Here I am, still involved with the Parrish-Hallam family. Only it's Nelson now."

She had been shocked and startled by the whole affair. It had not occurred to her as a possibility, or, at any rate, as in the least probable, that Letty would leave Nelson and leave him so coldly, so ruthlessly, with such harsh and unfeeling haste. The butter, she had thought, the good butter that Nelson had always spread so generously on Letty's bread, that alone would keep her there. But she was mistaken, it seemed. Penniless though Letty was, she had gone, and was occupying a room in the flat of a woman friend in Mayfair, to which her letters were now forwarded. She had left the house in Hyde Park Square for ever ; the great house, more suitable for a Legation than a home, which now reared its many floors above the head of a stricken, bewildered man whose blank, fixed look filled Maud's heart with pity. Below stairs were Mr. and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, whispering together, unsettled by what had occurred, thinking of retiring and keeping hens in the country, but not liking to leave Mr. Hallam and the very high wages he paid them just now, while he was ill.

Letty's going had, indeed, had something of the effect of a bomb, leaving the house in a deathly, ruined silence. Maud, hurrying there on first hearing the news, summoned by O'Shaughnessy's frightened voice on the telephone, felt rather like a rescue squad, though the doctor, a new man—the Hallams' old doctor had died during the war—was there before her. Mr. Hallam, he said, had had a stroke, though fortunately a light one. These heavy, full-blooded men were apt to react in this way to the sort of shock his patient had just received. And he was suffering too, of course, like many others, from the long strain of the war years. "Surely," he said, "Mrs. Hallam can be persuaded to come back." Maud could barely repress a smile as she told him that once Mrs. Hallam had made up her mind to take a certain step, she would be extremely unlikely to change it. After giving Nelson such comfort as she could, she went, at his urgent request, to see Letty. Letty seemed very glad to see her, and was her usual self, though perhaps a little excited, and her air of pretty defiance had not left her. Nelson, she said, had only himself to blame. "He'll suffer for a while, of course," she said, "just as a man suffers when he has to give up drinking or smoking. I'm a habit of a good many years' standing, but I'm only a habit. Let him get his eldest daughter to come and live with him. You know where she is. I don't. She's responsible for a good half of the trouble. But please don't let him think, for a moment, Maud, that I'll weaken and go back. Whatever happens, I won't do that. And that's final. Absolutely final."

It seemed almost indecent, in the face of this hardness of hers, to tell her that Nelson had had a stroke, though a slight one. But Maud did tell her. Letty's

face stiffened, her very backbone seemed to stiffen. "I'm sorry," she said. "I hope he'll soon be better, but don't expect this to send me running back to him. We've all got to die, though I hope Nelson will live for many years yet. I stuck to him all through the war," she added, "don't forget that."

Maud had expected Letty to question her closely about her marriage, to dart at her a volley of brisk interrogations, not without a little affectionate sarcasm. Why, after all these years, Letty would surely want to know, had she and Lowell decided on such a surprising step? What had brought it about? Had the gossips been gossiping? What could marriage do to further cement such an old and enduring and close friendship? How was it turning out? And what did her family and friends think of it? For all these and other questions Maud was more or less prepared; what she was not at all prepared for was Letty's acceptance of it as a thing past and done with, though only spoken of, as yet, in brief letters. A few years ago she knew she could have counted on Letty's vivid, even embarrassing interest. Now the whole subject was lightly, summarily dismissed in the fewest possible words.

"And how is Lowell? I'm sure you've made him very happy, Maud. He simply existed for you, as we know. I think you said you were all living together in the house in Boston. Well, it can't make much difference. He spent most of his time there anyway."

Maud picked up a part of this and replied:

"I believe he's better. Certainly he's no worse. And he seems very happy."

"Aunt Lou wrote to me after the wedding," Letty said, with her new, preoccupied air, as if two-thirds

of her mind were elsewhere, "but she didn't give me any details. Do you think she'll be very much upset about my leaving Nelson?"

"I'm quite sure she will," Maud told her. "She hates to hear of divorces among her friends."

"Well, I can't help it," said Letty, and opened her cigarette case. "I'm sorry about it, but I can't help it. She'll get used to the idea in time." And then she said, her voice losing none of its music: "I suppose you'll write and tell Mary about me."

"I think Nelson has already done so," Maud replied.

"Well, thank heaven I've done with her for ever." And now she spoke with the old asperity that talk of Mary had nearly always caused. "Thank heaven I shall never, never have to lay eyes on her again." And in a flash Maud saw the old, characteristic, pretty ferocity, the bright, hard look, as if an angry bird had just spoken.

Maud was not sorry to have been spared Letty's questioning, but at the same time she realised, with a foolish, illogical sadness, that this old friendship which for so many years had been a part of her life, was withering fast; and because she was tenacious and unwavering in her relationships with others, the knowledge afflicted her as she had not thought it would. She was not fond, she supposed, of change, and she had lately found far more of it than she liked. The great, unyielding, battered city she so loved had not yet grown familiar to her, though she supposed it would, in time. Her friends were scattered. She had made no contacts with picture dealers; she had nothing at present to do with the world of art. By the end of her busy days she was often too tired for anything but her bed, but where Nelson was concerned she did not

spare herself, for his need of her at this crisis was very great.

In the end it was to Nelson that she had had to give an account of her marriage, the account that she had prepared for Letty. Yes, she told him, in answer to his question, she had taken the decision quite suddenly. It was just at the end of that visit to Paris, just after Mary's disappearance, though of course the two events were not in any way connected. Lowell had received some news of a private nature that had given him a severe shock. So severe that for a while she had feared it might endanger his life.

"I think Paris tired him a good deal," she said. "Perhaps we made him do too much. Then this news came, and he collapsed. I was badly frightened. He wanted to go back to America by himself, but of course I couldn't let him do that, and as Mary took herself off at about that time I decided to cut short my stay and go back with him. During his illness I realised that he really wasn't in a fit state to live alone, that he needed someone to look after him. And as we had always been very fond of each other it seemed sensible to marry. Which we did, as soon as we got home. I took him straight to Cape Cod, where my mother had a house, and we were married there."

"I think you were very wise," Nelson said. "Has he more or less recovered now?"

"Well, he's more contented in his mind, and you know as well as I do how that affects the health. The doctor sees an improvement in him. Of course a lot of my friends thought I was simply crazy to marry at my time of life, but that didn't greatly concern me. And you know my mother was always devoted to Lowell from the time he was a boy."

It was the best she could do ; the facts were not for others' ears. Looking back she realised how easy it had all been made for her. Her mother, imperturbable at seventy-five, had not been much taken by surprise, Bart, her son, was rarely at hand when wanted ; it was good to have another man in the family. And she had always doubted the entire propriety of those trips abroad. Now Maud and Lowell could do as they pleased. She had never wanted Maud to marry outside their own Boston circle. She had not done so, and Mrs. Cotter derived considerable pleasure from this fact.

But Maud herself could still scarcely realise what she had done. The change in her life was prodigious. Her freedom, her beloved, necessary freedom was now a thing of the past. This six months' trip on behalf of UNRRA could never be repeated. Henceforth, for as long as she and Lowell lived, they would be together, always together. In his gratitude and satisfaction, Lowell had almost entirely forgiven her. He could almost feel that what he had suffered in Paris, and he had suffered vilely, had been worth while. She had destroyed the past for him, but she had given him the present and the future, and he knew the value of these ; the greater, more living value.

"But Maudie," he sometimes said, though without anguish now, "if only you had trusted me. I was closer to you than anyone. You could have confided in me and I would have told you that these affairs between a girl and a married man are always doomed. They never make for happiness. They never can. Look at the suffering he caused you, all of which could have been avoided. You sacrificed the best years of your life to him."

And Maud would utter a silent, ashamed little prayer : " Don't listen, Martin ; oh, don't listen ! You and I know it isn't true, or not in our case. You and I know how grateful I am for every moment we had together."

Her account of her marriage took Nelson's mind, for a while, from his unhappy state. Lowell ought to consider himself very lucky, he thought, to be able to spend the later years of his life with a woman like Maud. Any man ought. And then his thoughts turned inwards again. His own two marriages, both hopefully begun, had turned out badly, and yet he could not hate Letty enough to regret the years spent with her or to wish the past undone. What gaiety she had had, what spirits, what charm ! He remembered the day, the moment, when she had first brushed her hair upwards to the top of her head and arranged it there. The sight had stabbed him to the heart with poignant pleasure, a pleasure that was mixed with pain because she was so much younger than he. Oh, how soon would he forget ? How soon ? How soon would memories of her grow dim ? He knew he had not years enough to live, and he knew that he was glad he had not.

He turned to Maud, who had now said all she wished to say about her marriage and had got up to pour herself out a drink, and once more brought up the subject of Letty. Was she, Maud, herself convinced beyond any shadow of doubt that it was all over ? That there was no going back ? No hope that they might somehow come together again ?

" You'll think I'm very weak, Maud, but I'd forgive her anything if she wanted me to. Before things have gone too far she could come back. She need only say the word. Does she know that ? Did you make it

really plain to her? I know she doesn't read my letters."

The worst thing that could happen to Nelson now, Maud saw, would be to be left in any doubt as to Letty's intentions. She therefore made it as plain to him as she could that from now on he would have to contrive to live without his wife. "I've been suspicious of her. I've worried her about Mary; I've been jealous of Walsh, and of other men. I've been petty, petty! Oh, Maud, I blame myself. I blame myself more than I blame her."

This evening he was downstairs in his library, where the photograph of Letty in her presentation gown still stood and smiled. He was sitting in an arm-chair, a rug over his knees. His face had lost some of its mobility; his expression was now centred in his eyes. "You tragic creature," Maud thought, "I wish I could tell you that I always liked you better than I liked Letty, but you don't want to hear that now."

"Ought you to be out of bed?" she asked.

"I loathe staying in bed. And I can't have Shaw carrying trays up to my room. It's good of you to come, Maud. You're the only link I have, now, with Letty. I'm glad Ivor and Lucille are away. They're better out of this."

"I wish I could do more for you, Nelson," said Maud. "It breaks my heart to see you alone in this great house."

"I'll sell it as soon as I can," he told her. "I'll be glad to be out of it. It has too many memories." There was a moment's silence, then he said:

"Before Mary comes, tell me, has Letty said anything more? Given any reasons? Any clue to her—" he hesitated—"her future plans?"

"She tells me nothing at all," Maud answered. "She rang me up this morning, but she only repeats the same things; she was bored, she'd had enough, you'd got hopelessly on each other's nerves, only you weren't honest enough to admit it. And so on, and so on. If she has other reasons—and we know she must have—she isn't ready to tell me yet."

"Do you think it can be Walsh?" he asked, with an effort. She saw that this suspicion haunted him.

She had her answer ready.

"I've only met him once, but I really can't see that man allowing himself to get involved in a divorce case. I should say he was much too cautious, and has much too promising a career ahead of him."

With his fixed stare, his stricken look, he said, speaking with a new hesitation:

"I've been very jealous of Walsh, though I don't know that I had any reasons to be. But I think you're right. He'd be too cautious. He'd think of his career. No, it can't be Walsh. Then who is it?"

Maud asked herself whether or not she should tell him of certain suspicions that had formed themselves in her mind. She had only met Colonel Everard once, but she felt almost certain that it was he with whom Letty had fallen in love (if falling in love described at all, she thought, what went on in the minds of women like Letty who, at some point in their lives, coolly resolve to exchange one husband for another). But she decided not to name him, or permit herself to jump at conclusions.

"Do you think it could possibly be that American, Colonel Everard?" he asked, as if he were following her thoughts. "I shouldn't have thought he was Letty's type—but how is one to know? How well

do I know Letty?" He frowned gloomily, and then said, turning his head slowly, stiffly, towards Maud: "Maud, can you remember Letty's father? What was he like?"

Maud said that she remembered him very well. "He made a great impression on me," she said, "probably because I knew he was making poor Mrs. Parrish so unhappy. The first time mother and I went there to lunch he came in late, in a furious temper because he said he hadn't been told there were going to be visitors. We'd finished our lunch, and Mrs. Parrish had to cook lunch for him while Letty entertained us in the living-room. He was a good-looking man, very good-looking in a weak way. He had the sort of mouth that seems specially designed to fit the rim of a glass. Do you know what I mean? It was thin and a little sunken, and it curved up at the corners, but not at all agreeably. Poor Mrs. Parrish. Did Letty feel her death very much?"

He asked, dully: "Does Letty ever feel anything very much?"

Maud was spared having to make an answer, for just then the front door-bell rang. Nelson looked at her inquiringly. "Mary?" he asked, and ran his tongue nervously over his lips.

"Shall I go and let her in?" Maud asked, but he shook his head. "Shaw will go. I'd like you to stay here with me."

They could hear Mary's voice greeting Shaw, and his, in reply; then children's voices, and there was a pause in the hall while coats were taken off. Then Mary came into the room, holding a child by either hand.

"Here we are!" she cried. "Father! Are you better? Oh, Maud, how glad I am to see you."

She went to him and kissed him, then turned to kiss Maud. Her father watching her, thought he would scarcely have known her. The pallid, delicate girl had put on weight, roundness, ripeness. She had colour, animation. She had the alert, half-humorous look of a woman who has much to do with children and is amused more than she is harassed by them. She had the quick, seeing eye of someone who is watchful of and for others, but who has a happy personal life, so that the care and the watchfulness are given out of fullness and plenty, not out of poverty and lack. That she envied no one, hated no one, feared no one, was in her calm eyes. They saw, the two who explored her face with such intentness, that she had been re-born, that the girl they had known was now buried deep, and that Mary Garstin had unbelievably improved upon and added to Mary Hallam. But to one of the two this change was not altogether pleasing. Nelson had longed to see once more the daughter who had been lost to him for over six years. It was the unhappy, frustrated girl he had hoped to welcome home with forgiveness; the delicate, shy, unloved stranger, on whom he had hoped to bestow all that he had withheld before. And now, anxiously, he saw that she had passed far beyond the need of him; that there was nothing he could now do for her but grant her the forgiveness she might or might not ask of him.

"Well, father," she said, smiling, "here they are, your two grandsons. David is the eldest; he's five. George is three. They've never been to London before. Don't you think they're pretty good? It's been a long day for them. David, go to your grandfather and tell him about the train we came in. Tell him what it was like?"

Nelson held out an arm, and the little boy went slowly towards him, and when it encircled him, he stood very quietly and a little shyly within it, looking earnestly at his grandfather. Maud lifted up George, delighted with his roundness and sturdiness, and put him on her knee, but he wriggled off it and went to Mary, who, with a laughing apology to Maud, lifted him on to her own knee. "They see so few strangers, where we live," she explained. David could not seem to bring himself to speak, but turned and looked anxiously at his mother.

"Tell your grandfather what pulled the train," she prompted him.

The child looked into Nelson's face and said, "A engine; a great big engine."

"A great big engine, was it? And did you go fast?"

David nodded. "And a lady gave George an orange," he volunteered.

"Well, he was in luck," said Nelson, keeping his arm about him. "Nothing of Letty here," he was thinking. "Nothing. Mary and her mother and myself, and his father. No taint of Letty." And as he heard the word "taint" in his own mind, he was dismayed, and flinched from it.

"Where is your husband?" he asked Mary.

"Well," said Mary, and coloured, "we didn't know whether you'd feel well enough to see him to-day or not. As a matter of fact, he's walking round and round the square, waiting for a signal. If you'd like to see him, I'll call him in."

"Of course I want to see him," Nelson said. "I expected him. You're all sleeping here. Shaw has your old room ready, with two beds in it, and there

are two beds for the children in Lucille's room next door. Call him in, by all means."

"Oh, thank you!" Mary cried. "When Maud wrote that we could all sleep here I was afraid it might be too much trouble, and Alan arranged to share a room with a friend of his. But of course we'd much rather—it will be lovely. He can easily telephone." She put George down, and said, "Come darling, we'll go and find Daddy."

"How well she looks!" exclaimed Maud, when she had gone out of the room, "and how she's changed! How amazingly she's changed!"

David was looking a little apprehensively from Maud to his grandfather. It was clear that he longed to run after his mother, but he controlled himself and stood quietly by Nelson's chair. He was tall for his age, less sturdy than George, but they both had their father's thick, straight fair hair and blue eyes. David had his mother's sensitive mouth and chin. Yes, David said, he was learning to read. He could do sums. He would go to school next year.

"They must take after their father," Nelson said to Maud. "They don't look much like the Hallam family." But there was no regret in his voice. His self-esteem had suffered too severely; Letty's leaving had diminished him too cruelly. He thought of his past life without satisfaction; it had all led up to this disaster, been wasted, been purposeless, and the thought of the knighthood he was to receive in the next Honours List for his work at the Ministry of Supply ameliorated nothing. When he thought of the homecoming of Ivor and Lucille, he knew that he would draw small pleasure from their presence. When they had come home on brief leaves, they had made use of the house and of him,

but they had given him little. He disliked Ivor's friends—young men who liked to sit on the floor and talk about the stage. Lucille was kind, dutiful; she talked about her job freely and amusingly enough, but neither he nor Letty were in her confidence. She gave him no cause for complaint except that she stayed out too late, but he knew she did not love him and had never loved him. He could not see where he had been remiss, or been to blame. He and Letty had done what they thought right and proper in the bringing up of their children. And yet he already saw, in the few moments that Mary had been there, that this was a family such as his own had never been, though he could not have said why; or where, exactly, the difference lay.

Mary was quickly back again, this time with a strongly built man with blunt, unhandsome features and thick fair hair; wearing somewhat ill-fitting clothes and displaying neither shyness nor eagerness. He went straight to Nelson and shook hands with him.

"I'm sorry you've been ill, sir. I hope you're better. Mary was very worried. We came as soon as we could, but there were things that had to be arranged at home before we could leave."

"Of course, of course," said Nelson, and Mary saw with sharp pity how his eyes stared, how fixed and unfamiliar was his look. "I'm very glad indeed to see you here," he said, formally.

"And this is Maud," Mary said, a hand on Alan's arm.

"I guessed that. I've heard a lot about you. How are you?"

Maud said she was extremely happy to see them all at last.

"I've always had a very warm place in my heart for

Mary," she said, "and so has my husband"—she used the word with the slight self-consciousness of a woman who marries late in life—"in spite of the naughty trick she played on us in Paris."

"She behaved very badly," said Alan, "and she knows it, and so do I. But then, if she'd behaved better we'd never have met, and David and George wouldn't be here." And he and Mary looked at each other, and exchanged a smile.

"I'm very much ashamed, father," said Mary, as Alan and Maud talked together. She drew a chair close to his, and David, now released by his grandfather, leaned against her knee. "I'm really terribly ashamed. You've been so forbearing, and so kind. I don't deserve it. Will you forgive me?"

Tears rushed to his eyes.

"I'm a sick man," he said, and his head drooped forward. Then he raised it again to say, "There's no question of forgiveness. I was a poor sort of father to you."

"Oh, no," she answered. "You gave me everything you could. You couldn't give me happiness. How could you? I had to find that for myself. But I was a thankless girl."

He shook his head. "Never mind. That's all past now, like so much else." He sighed and looked over at Alan, who caught his eye. "Tell me what you're doing now," he asked.

"Well, sir," said Alan, "you know I'm an engineer, specialising in radar. I've been setting up stations wherever they were needed, right through the war. Now I'm home on a bit of leave. Mary has had to carry on alone, and I don't know how she's done it. She's been a heroine. But now we hope that's over."

I'm going to an experimental station in the Midlands soon, and the family will come with me, Mary and the children and my mother."

"Is your mother better?" asked Maud. "Mary told me about her in one of her letters."

"She's about as well as she ever will be," said Alan.

"We'll have to sell our little house in Wiltshire," Mary said. "We hate to give it up, but we must. David and George were both born there."

"Is that where you've been living all this time?" Nelson asked.

"Yes, in the depths of the country," Mary said, and added, almost apologetically, "the children have never heard the sound of a bomb."

"They're none the worse for that," said her father.

"Alan's heard plenty," she said. "He's been on the South Coast most of the time."

Maud was looking at her hands. They were rough and lined; hands that had been too much in water. The nails were blunted. The crippled right hand had done its full share of work. They were the hands, Maud thought, of a working man's wife, but this did not seem to her a tragedy; this seemed to her a small price to pay for happiness and those two boys. Whatever the price to Mary, it was plain that she had paid it gladly.

"Have you had any help in the house?" she asked.

"The best possible help," Mary said. "A wounded soldier, the son of a neighbouring farmer. He came of his own accord and volunteered to help. He's staying in the house, looking after my mother-in-law now. She's very fond of him. I don't know what I'd have done without him."

"That's Arthur Dykes," said George, who was now sitting on his father's knee. "He teaches me things."

Then Maud said :

"What I'm longing to hear, Mary, is what you did and where you went after you left Paris. What happened to you, and how did you two meet?"

At this point, David created a diversion. He looked at Mary with an eager, expectant look, as of one who hopes to have a long deferred wish fulfilled, and said :

"Where is it? Can't I see it? You promised I could see it."

"Don't interrupt us when we're talking," said Alan. However much he may have welcomed the diversion for Mary's sake, he was not going to let David get away with bad manners. Mary gave him a swift look of collaboration, and then turned to David :

"You know you mustn't interrupt when grown-ups are talking," she chided him, "but I know how much you want to see it. Father," she said, "your grandson has inherited my passion for music. In fact he gets it from the Garstin side of the family, too. Ever since he was three, I've told him about the grand piano, and promised him he should see it some day. He's only seen an upright. Do you think I might take him into the drawing-room?"

Nelson looked at the clock. "It's nearly their supper-time, isn't it?" he said. He was feeling very tired. "I told Shaw they'd want their supper as soon as they came."

"Could I please see the piano now?" David asked politely.

"The room is all in dust-sheets," Nelson said, "but go in if you like, of course."

"We can soon open it up," Maud said, and got up.

"Come along, it will only take a minute." To her surprise, Nelson put aside his rug and raised himself slowly from his chair. "I'll come with you," he said, and Mary took his arm as they went to the drawing-room. Maud switched on a standard lamp that stood bare, without its shade, while Alan and Mary folded back the dust-sheet from the great Bechstein. Mary was thinking of the hours she had spent in that room; of the night when Ferdinand Walsh had asked her to play, and had played himself; of the dinner-party, after she had told him she loved him, when they had scarcely spoken to each other; of the last evening before she went to Paris when Letty had offered her cheek for a good-bye kiss. But the little boy was staring at the piano. He had forgotten them all in his delighted amazement, he was entranced by the polished monster whose open key-board now confronted him. He went forward in a kind of silent ecstasy, tip-toeing softly over the parquet to the piano bench. He knew that this was his moment, the moment that had been solemnly promised to him. Authority was now in abeyance; authority was content to let him do as he pleased. He approached his longed-for moment in communion with himself. His whole small being hungered for the sound of a pressed key. He hitched himself up on the bench and gave a little wriggle to seat himself more firmly. Then, gently, he struck middle C. After a rapturous moment he turned to look at his mother with a face that was a mere vehicle for the expression of utter joy. Then he forgot everything but the delight of listening, and struck the same key again, a little louder, as if he were not yet ready for more blisses, could not, as yet, encompass more. He let the sound die away then lifted both hands and holding them suspended

TWO NAMES UPON THE SHORE

over the keys, struck a chord, a chord he had practised a hundred times on the old hired upright piano at home. Then, with the same careful deliberation, another, and another. The magnificence of those small chords echoing in the great room, the joyous pain of complete fulfilment, overcame him. He slipped abruptly off the bench, ran to his father and burst into tears.

"Now, now, lad," said Alan lifting him up, "what's all this? Crying for joy, are you? Well, you're not the first that's done that."

George's small voice made itself heard.

"David's crying," he announced.

The door opened and Shaw came in, surprised to find them there, and said, in his usual mournful way, that the children's supper was now ready in the dining-room.

THE END



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